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### **MANAGING UP: CREATING A WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BOSS**

It is important to establish at the outset that Managing Up is not a process for kissing up, sucking up, being a toady, or manipulating a boss through shameless self-promotion.

The second thing to understand is that all relationships are managed, even the most intimate ones. Both parties to any relationship have an active role to play in seeing to it that it works. Managing a relationship means making a deliberate effort to bring understanding and cooperation to a relationship between two individuals who share a common goal, but who also quite often have different personalities, preferences, ideas, perspectives, and behavioral styles.

The opposite of managing up, by the way, is deciding simply to sit back and wait: wait for instructions on how to do your job, wait for the next promotion, wait for others to recognize your brilliance and true worth, and so on. This passive approach to bosses makes it very difficult for them in turn to create an authentic relationship with you.

What makes managing up so difficult, of course, is that any relationship with an authority figure has within it a power imbalance, often a huge one. Mishandling this process has some penalties. Nevertheless, management experts universally agree that mastering the skills involved in this process is critical for anyone pursuing a meaningful role and a career in contemporary organizations. Such a relationship takes time to build up, and the best ones occur in a series of stages. Here's what they are:

#### **Stage 1: BUILDING TRUST & RAPPORT**

Team Leaders have a right to expect that their team members are aligned with the unit's goals and strategies, and that they will bring energetic contributions to that end. Here are the kinds of things followers can do to create that sort of feeling:

1. Be clear on the boss's expectations of you and your team. A checklist for accomplishing this will appear later in this newsletter.
2. Be sensitive to her priorities, and spend some time learning about and then understanding her perspective and agenda.
3. Try to anticipate problems likely to arise in pursuit of that agenda, and provide early warnings if it looks like things are going off track; nobody likes surprises.
4. Act like a partner by accepting responsibility for what you undertake.
5. Look for any way you can to save his time and to value it.

6. Value the time you get with your boss. Choose more frequent but brief meetings, rather than long marathons
7. Try to solve and fix as many problems as you can on your own. If the problem big enough to bring to the boss's attention, be sure to also carry with you some solutions or options. "If they're going to bring me a dead cat," said one regional director, "they also better bring along a shovel."
8. As quickly as you can, pick up on their pressure points and hot buttons. And keep them in mind when you respond.
9. Learn what her strengths are, figure out ways to leverage them.
10. Learn what his weaknesses are; find ways to overcome, or compensate, or steer around them. Always try to make your boss look good.
11. Request feedback often; listen to it carefully; accept it, whether you think it's accurate or not.
12. As quickly as you can, learn the difference between your boss's management style and your own; then figure out as best you can a way to bridge them.
13. Communicate with her on a consistent basis; most of those communications should be brief and to the point, and should consist mostly of updates, news items they don't already know, tip-offs of future events.
14. Most of the steps listed above mean that you should learn by honing your observational skills. This is especially true of an ability to pick up quickly on moods and reactions.
15. The longer you are with the organization, the more you will want to tie your requests, proposals, and project directions to the boss's and the Agency's overarching goals.
16. Don't bad-mouth colleagues to the boss, and don't gossip.
17. Be prudent about how much of your life away from work you reveal, or how much you probe for your boss's time away from work.
18. Despite your best efforts, don't expect your boss (or anybody else, for that matter) to change all that much. The important thing to pick up on is how they will consistently respond in life situations, because that will allow you just as consistently to work through it or around it.

### **Stage 2: FIGURING OUT WHEN TO MANAGE UP**

Research indicates that these are the most cited reasons why team members feel a disconnect or discomfort such that managing up seems to be called for:

1. The Boss doesn't think you're as good as you think you are.
2. You think your boss got the job you should have.
3. There is a large gap in skills which leads to undervaluing/not respecting the other (either direction).
4. Mismatches in ethics, values and integrity.
5. Mismatches in management practices.
6. Mismatches in style, philosophy, pace, or motivation.
7. Poor communication---in both directions.

What are the kind of things a boss does when you find the need to manage up? Basically, when the boss becomes an unpredictable moving target. Just when you thought things were ticking along as they should, he or she goes and does something surprising that you didn't dream they would do. Some examples:

1. She doesn't invite you to a meeting to which you should have been invited.
2. He goes around you to communicate important issues to people who are ordinarily your direct contacts.
3. She constantly drops the ball regarding important issues that affect your work
4. It appears he is attempting to do his job and your job at the same time.

### **Step 3: PURSUE YOUR OWN NEEDS IN THE RELATIONSHIP**

The first two steps in this process suggest that your boss is at present the single greatest determinant of your success, that paying attention to his or her style and preferences should receive your great attention, and that there is a range of behaviors that will make that happen. But since all relationships are two-way streets, managing up means that at some point you have to make sure your needs and wants are also being addressed. Here are some things you may wish to keep in mind in that regard;

1. Your job here is to add perceived value to the organization. To do that, in at least some measure you have to be listened to.
2. Learn over time exactly which job functions to take on, which to delegate, and which to negotiate.
3. To manage your boss, learn to be a top-notch negotiator. Remember that when negotiating with people in a relationship, the object is not to win or come out on top, but to create outcomes that are fair to all parties. Pick up a slender copy of "Getting to Yes" by Ury and Fisher to refresh your memory of how that's done. You never get what you don't request. Know what you want and be clear in asking for it.
4. Practice using direct, clear speech when discussing things with authority figures. If this does not come naturally to you, take a distance learning course on Plain Talk and Assertion.
5. While it is important to level with your boss, it is a mistake to compete with him or her. You will always lose.
6. If you are given an unrealistic work assignment from your boss, the first step is to present options on prioritizing your workload to you boss.
7. Get involved in your profession and gain higher standing in your field. It will add immeasurably to legitimate feelings of self-confidence. You do this by networking, expanding your skill mix, staying informed, participating in professional groups, and the like.
8. Be absolutely dependable in delivering on your commitments and promises. Here are some things in that regard to keep in mind:
  - Keep promises to a minimum; never make rash or hasty promises.
  - Make specific, not general promises
  - Make close-ended promises by putting a time limit on them.
  - Under-promise, over-deliver.
  - Admit when things are beyond your control or your abilities.
  - Learn to goodmouth; always look for the best in people and situations.
9. Here are some final, general communication tips for talking to authority figures: start off by doing your homework; listen carefully and with full attention to what the other says; listen for gist, not to debate or refute; be persistent and patient; be

- clear and assertive; allow for face-saving---don't back the boss into a corner, because your goal is clarity and equity, not embarrassment.
10. Never, never, never complain to others about your boss.

#### **Stage 4: WHAT IF YOUR BOSS IS THE PROBLEM?**

Don't try to go over your boss's head or behind his/her back. That is not the way to manage up and can permanently ruin your relationship and your career. Always try to work something out. If the boss is a serious problem and you have no other options left, you can report this issue higher up the chain of command as a last resort under these conditions:

1. Your project is on the line, and there is an urgent problem your boss continues to ignore.
2. Your boss is doing something illegal.
3. Your boss has a serious physical illness, mental illness, or substance abuse problem that you are aware of and others aren't.
4. Your boss is doing something (e.g., sexual harassment or contracting irregularities) that could lead to lawsuits, criminal charges, or bad publicity.