



Book Managing Up

59 Ways to Build a Career-Advancing Relationship with Your Boss

Deborah Singer Dobson and Michael Dobson
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Recommendation

If your notions of how to get along with your boss stopped at the admiring-the-family-photos-on-the-credenza stage, here's how to move it along. Michael Dobson and Deborah Singer Dobson advance kissing-up to a new, practical level, as they straightforwardly explain their boss-wrangling concepts. You can read the brief chapters in bite-size chunks and each one ends with a worksheet. While these concepts about understanding your boss and playing to the boss's priorities are not particularly innovative, they are useful and accessible. The Dobsons wrote their book as much for the folks in the cubicles as for the fellow in the office with his feet on the desk. Reading this book won't change your boss's personality - but it might blunt his pitchfork. *BooksInShort.com* recommends it to staffers who want to get ahead by getting along with the boss, the gatekeeper to the top. And if that takes a little manipulation, well, hey, it's business.

Take-Aways

- Your first job in any job is developing a productive relationship with the boss.
- Your relationship with your boss is the single greatest determinant of your success.
- You are there to add value to your organization. Do so, and people will listen to you.
- To work effectively with your boss, accept his or her humanity. Remember that a person's foibles can be magnified by an elevated job title.
- Understand your boss's personality type and communications style.
- Learn which job functions to take on, which to delegate and which to negotiate.
- To manage your boss, learn to be a top-notch negotiator.
- Don't compete with your boss. You will lose.
- If you have to give your boss negative feedback on his or her job performance, first state shared goals, address behavioral issues and finally tell how you feel.
- If you are given an unrealistic work assignment, present options on prioritizing your workload to your boss.

Summary

Manage Your Boss

As an employee, you have at least one person you are responsible for - your boss. To manage your boss successfully, start by doing your job efficiently. Building good relationships won't take you anywhere without adequate job performance. Doing good work but having a poor relationship with the boss also dooms you. Follow these steps to provide your employer with an excellent work product, because that is the first step in "managing up."

- Learn your job description - It is the basis of your company's expectations. If there's a gap between it and reality, consider asking to change your job description to fit your job.
- Exceed expectations - Once you know what your boss's expectations are, work to exceed them. That is how you create value for your organization. Study the critical elements of the company's performance-appraisal form. How does it measure superior performance? If your organization doesn't provide performance objectives, create them for yourself as benchmarks to measure your success. Don't get so caught up in details that you neglect the future. Address your long-term goals.
- Demand feedback - Okay, maybe "demand" is too harsh a word. But you need to know whether you are getting it right or not. Align your priorities with your boss's priorities.
- AOE: ask, observe, experiment - When bosses shy away from giving you feedback, adjust your approach by following the AOE formula. "Ask" means explaining your need for consistent feedback, and simply asking your boss for the most efficient or convenient way for him to provide it. "Observe" means to study your boss's style to determine what strategies might work. See how your co-workers get feedback and try the same tactics. "Experiment" means to try different approaches until one works.

Don't Compete With Your Boss

Be supportive of your co-workers and your boss, not competitive. You can't succeed when you are expending energy trying to prove that you should be in charge. Find common interests with your colleagues so you can both advance. See how you can advance your interests by promoting the interests of others. Believe in the concept of team goals. To manage up successfully, consistently demonstrate that you are a team player. Your success is inherently tied up with that of your boss and co-workers.

Get Involved in Your Profession

You can do several very productive things to gain higher standing in your field.

- Build your network - This will help you learn new job techniques, expand your base of professional associations, initiate mentoring relationships and, perhaps, find a new job some day. What does this have to do with managing your boss? By making yourself a better employee, you become someone that others have to listen to - even your boss.
- Expand your knowledge - All companies tend to become insular in their approach to routine problems. By understanding your industry fully, you can help bring new insight to your company.
- Stay informed - By following the trade publications and speaking with your fellow professionals, you will learn much more about what is actually going on in your industry. This will eventually make you a more valuable employee.
- Participate - Joining your trade association is the first step. Active participation is important. Look for opportunities to contribute, including charitable activities.

Do You Know Your Boss's Style?

Your personal idiosyncrasies may seem minor compared to those of your boss - but that's because the boss's quirks affect a lot more people. As pollster Louis Harris once observed, "The higher a monkey gets up a tree, the more rear end he's got showing." So have a little compassion for your boss's position and try to understand his or her style. Often you can be more effective if you change the way you present your message, and you don't have to alter the message to do so. Communications expert Tony Alessandra coined The Platinum Rule: "Do unto others in the style they prefer to be done unto." You can use many different systems, such as the Myers-

Briggs Type Indicator, to delineate individual communication styles. One approach is the personality explorer, which defines four main personality types based on their behavior and priorities:

- Focusers - These people focus on work. They are often direct, and even authoritarian in style. They are bottom-line oriented, hands-on learners.
- Relaters - These people prioritize human relationships. They have a participatory view of management, preferring to coordinate and facilitate in a democratic and flexible environment. They want everyone involved and they learn by seeing and doing.
- Integrators - The integrator is the person in your office who always asks questions about the underlying reasons, theories and ideas behind a decision. Integrators are idea people who brainstorm and challenge concepts. They value innovation, want to be self-reliant, often take time to assess a situation, and learn from listening.
- Operators - These folks run your accounting and controller's office. They are interested in details and procedures, prefer to monitor and analyze others' activities, value documentation, tend to be controlling or systematic, and want to be valued for being ultimately accountable. They value compliance, respect procedures, need to know the system to be implemented, need clear boundaries and learn best by repetition.

Winning with Integrity

Personal honesty is an essential ingredient in your professional relationships, particularly with your boss. Here is how to preserve your reputation for doing as you say:

- Keep promises to a minimum - Do not make rash or hasty promises. As Napoleon said, "The best way to keep one's word is not to give it."
- Make specific, not general, promises - Otherwise, people may consider you dishonest for not delivering in all respects. Double-check to make sure that your commitment is understood and confirm it in writing. (And, remember it's better not to promise at all!)
- Make close-ended promises - Put a time limit to your promise.
- Under promise, over deliver - Err on the side of safety.
- Admit when matters are beyond your control.
- Learn to goodmouth - Anyone can badmouth; learn to look for the positive. Try to catch co-workers doing something right and make sure they get credit.

Study Your Boss's Preferences

To memo or not to memo, that is the question. Some executives like to hear things word-of-mouth. Others want to read it in a memo. Similarly, some companies emphasize paperwork and documentation, while others avoid it like the plague. Study how your boss likes to receive information, and provide it accordingly.

“The quality and effectiveness of your relationship with your boss specifically, and the management structure of the organization generally, is the key determinant of your overall success within the organization.”

Maybe your goals differ from your boss'. That's okay, but even so, the best way to achieve your goals is to understand your boss'. That way, you can do a better job of achieving both your goal and the boss'. Similarly, work toward the goals of your division or department.

Help Your Boss Succeed

You don't have to wait until your boss asks for your help to provide it. Look for an opportunity to provide assistance first. By providing help proactively, you enhance your value to the organization - and to your boss. Remember, you weren't hired to advance your objectives, but rather to promote the objectives of the people who pay your salary.

Negotiate Like a Pro

You can't succeed without developing negotiation skills. People often find negotiation distasteful because they envision it as a win-lose

proposition, where your success means defeating someone else. Actually, effective negotiation helps both parties. Move beyond the used-car sales model of negotiation, and take a win-win view that emphasizes the importance of preserving the relationship even after the negotiation. For win/win negotiation:

- Do your homework - Analyze your goal, focus on your interests as opposed to your positions, and determine your bottom line. Put yourself in the other person's place and do the same thing. Try to understand his goals and objectives as well as your own.
- Listen - This simple skill will tell you what the real issues are. You will be surprised how often you will be surprised, if only you learn to listen.
- Be persistent and patient - Maintain your dignity and your personal strength by refusing to bow to hard-nosed, unfair tactics. Don't be in a hurry to consummate a deal.
- Be clear and assertive - You don't get what you don't request. Know what you want and be clear in asking for it.
- Allow for face-saving - Don't back the other party into a corner. Embarrassment is not your goal. Perhaps appealing to a third party will help someone avoid losing face.
- Focus on the positive - What are the good aspects of the relationship? No relationship is perfect, but you can keep your sense of perspective about the parts that are good.

The P.R.A.I.S.E Method

Managers use this technique, but you can use it on them. P.R.A.I.S.E means positively influencing a relationship by making your praise fit these criteria: Personal, Regular, Assertive, Immediate, Sincere and Explicit. Use these elements to build positive bonds.

Learn To Tolerate Bad Moods

No one is always in a good mood. If your boss is grumpy, try not to take it personally. A bad mood is not the same things as being abusive or intimidating. Assume your boss is occasionally entitled to be grumpy, like anybody else. Learn the behavioral clues that tell you when the boss is in a bad mood. Avoid escalating the situation. Consider what you can do proactively, such as offering a cheerful hello or even telling a joke. This is all part of recognizing your boss's humanity, an important facet of learning to manage up. Bosses feel the same emotions you do, including: paranoia, self-doubt, insecurity, intimidation, fear and confusion. Accepting your boss's human frailties will reduce your stress level.

How To Say No

One way to preserve your credibility is to learn to say "no", even to the boss. Some people can't say "no," but it is better to say "no" than to say "yes" and fail to deliver. If you have to turn down an assignment from the boss or anyone else, begin by acknowledging the importance of the other person's goal or request. This shows you are listening and validates the other person. Then evaluate whether you want to postpone your response, present alternative options or offer a forced choice: "Would you like me to have that report on your desk by this afternoon, or would you prefer for those marketing letters to go out?" Present the difficulties that you face to your boss in a way that forces the boss to deal with them. Similarly, if you're given a work assignment and you are already overloaded, begin the discussion by acknowledging your willingness to do whatever the boss wants. Then provide facts to demonstrate your current workload, unless the boss is already aware of it. Then offer a choice rather than an ultimatum. Remember, sometimes you will have to repeat your position, firmly and assertively, for it to be taken seriously.

About the Authors

Michael Singer Dobson is a seminar leader in project management, personal success and communications. He is also an author and consultant. **Deborah Singer Dobson**, M.Ed., is vice president for human resources for GATX Terminals Corp. in Chicago. She has consulted on organizational development and management effectiveness for numerous Fortune 500 companies. The Dobsons live in Chicago.
