

Managing Your Boss

Unlike a friend, a boss is not someone you can choose. You normally have to accept the person whom you are supposed to report to. Whether you like it or not! It is therefore, important that you get off to a good start in your relationship with your boss. A good boss-subordinate relationship could help you progress in your career as your boss would recommend raises and promotions. On the other hand, a strained relationship could make life miserable for you at work and limit any opportunities for career advancement.

How does one go about managing a boss? To some people it may come naturally, while for others they may have to rack their brains to figure out what to do and yet feel they end up saying and doing the wrong thing at the wrong time!

In this article, we will attempt to offer some guidelines that could help you build a positive relationship with your boss and be beneficial to your career.

Do your job well with a non-threatening work style

The starting point is obvious and basic- do your job well. Boss management can help only if you are making a good effort at your work. Otherwise it will become a case of covering up your inefficiencies and weakness at work behind behavioral niceties, which will not have a chance to succeed, as they will only be superficial.

And in addition to this, an extremely important point-adapt a non-threatening work style. Your great initiative at work will get a tremendous setback if your boss finds you too aggressive or abrasive and begins to feel insecure. Your work style should not communicate to your boss in any way that you believe that you know more than him/her, or that you do not respect his/her superiority and authority.

Accept responsibilities, take initiative, and prepare for meetings. Make yourself indispensable to your boss without threatening him/her. Let him/her rely on you for assistance in gathering information or any other area where you appear to be relatively more competent, but with the feeling that you are a great help and not a threat.

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A boss has power that is derived from two sources the first being the power/authority that comes along with the position or designation. The second is to do with the individual's personality traits and interaction with others in the organization. You have to ensure that you give your boss due respect on both counts.

Remember then, be a smart and diligent worker and keep your boss feeling secure!

Understand your boss's working style and work within it

To manage your boss, it would be very useful to find out different aspects of your boss's working style. What makes your boss tick? You could use the following checklist to help you get to know your boss better.

- What are his/her goals?
- What does he/she expects from us?
- Does he/she have any idiosyncrasies e.g. getting the credit for all work done?
- What is he/she particular about e.g. punctuality?
- What irritates him/her?
- When is your boss most approachable?

Getting answers to these questions will help you adapt to your boss' working style and reduce conflict.

You could try and brand your boss into a specific personality type depending on his/her style of working. This could give you clues on how to work smarter with that type of a boss.

A few boss types you could consider are:

The Feudal Lord

This type of a boss likes to have a large group of supporters, sycophants and yes men. He/She invariably dislikes any opposition to his/her thoughts, ideas and way of doing things. If you agree, you are part of his liked ones, otherwise you are an irritant.

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What you could do:

Be careful not to let the quality of your work suffer in your desire to be “accepted”.

The Nit-Pick

Here, the boss has too much of an eye for detail and ends up nit picking on and on.

Use this format, left align that, reduce this by 5mm, stroke your t’s horizontally etc.

What you could do:

Try and toe the line as much as you can without losing sight of the overall picture of the job at hand.

The Slime

This boss type is as the name suggests-not clean and straightforward, but a great manipulator who could stab you in the back. This boss will not hesitate to pass the blame on to you if anything goes wrong. Neither will you get the credit for a good job done. This boss will spend more time in achieving personal gains.

What you could do:

Watch out, be cautious. Don’t be naïve. You may learn this after a couple of setbacks. Nevertheless, you need to get along with this boss types as well. Just organize yourself better and learn to “cover up” with well-documented facts in case of a problem.

The Slog

Here, it’s work, work and more work. This boss type is a confirmed workaholic. He may not pay attention to details but expects a lot of work to be done.

What you could do:

Work hard too. Meet deadlines. It’s a lot better than dealing with the slime!

Adopt the problem solving approach at work

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The next point in boss management relates to handling problems at work.. Do not panic when confronted with a crisis. Do not just oppose and disagree with your boss's ideas. Come up with a solution and justify it with a well thought out plan. This approach could also help in reducing unpleasant scenes and conflicts with your boss. Work could also proceed more smoothly.

Communicate and Keep your boss informed

This is essential in ensuring that work gets done on time and your boss is on top of it all in terms of information. The last thing you need is a situation where your boss's boss enquires about the status of a project and you did not update your boss, on the current position. Your boss would get caught on the wrong foot and could then pile on to you for not having provided all the information. To avoid these situations, keep your boss updated regularly on the status of work in the pipeline. This will make him/her look good and will let you breathe easy!

Also clarify priorities and deadlines regularly to ensure that you are working on the right item at a particular time. This will be very helpful in situations where priorities shift over time.

Be honest and do not compromise on ethics

It always pays to speak the truth. Ask for help where you need it. Admit your mistakes. Give credit where it is due. This will make your boss trust you. He/She will know that you can be relied on to tell the truth in the case of mud-slinging conflicts across departments. Your strength will be that you tell the truth whatever the situation and not just to take the credit or avoid the flak.

Do not compromise on ethics. Never sabotage work to spite your boss.

Do not condemn your boss to others

This is something you really have to watch out for, as it is very common to crib about your boss to your colleagues. It often makes you feel better to have someone to complain to, who could agree with you and confirm your negative emotions about your boss. Avoid using this as a way of getting friendly with your colleagues or a way of joining one of the power cramps in the organization.

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Resist the temptation to bad mouth your boss. Try to grin and bear it if you are stuck with a difficult boss till you find a workable solution. Going to the Human Resources department and complaining will not help. It is a misconception that the Human resources department will sort out such problems at work. They are concerned primarily with the needs of the organization as a whole and not such issues related to specific individual problems. A move such as complaining to HR could probably get back to your boss and will only make matters worse.

Be Flexible and not rigid in your style

Let your work style be compromising and flexible. Do not be too rigid as this could put off your boss and communicate that you are too adamant and aggressive instead of being supportive and co-operative. Also, a rigid style could give your boss the impression that you are too competitive and this may your boss feel insecure which is when problems start!

Record dates and important instructions

To ensure that you stay on top of your job and avoid getting into trouble when it's time to pass the blame, keep a record of dates and key instructions relating to your work.

It may sound like a repository of unnecessary information, but it could help you a great extent in the event of a crisis. Not to say that you should use this to malign your boss, but keep yourself out of such a mess as much as possible.

If you try and follow some of these guidelines, you could end up with a positive relationship with your boss. Remember, the situation is not that bad. You as a subordinate are also very important to the boss!

And if you find yourself in a terribly hopeless and frustrating relationship with your boss, despite your repeated attempts to improve things-do not lose heart. It's not the end of the world! Just pack up and move on!