

MANAGER MOMENTS

HOW TO MANAGE UPWARD

What do you do when the difficult person at work is your boss? Maybe she's so disorganized that she thinks she has communicated information, tasks, and deadlines when she really hasn't. Maybe he doesn't want to be bothered with questions, but gets irritated that you haven't read his mind. Maybe she hands off a project to you and your team only to step in again and again to make sure that everything is being done the "right way" – the way she would do it. What about the boss who gives you little or no direction only to criticize your work after the fact?

Every boss has a different style and is human just like you with strengths and weaknesses. But sometimes their weaknesses create a barrier for you to be as successful as you know you could be. How can you help your people and yourself when the challenge you are facing is *your boss*? Good question! Let's look at the three principles that will help you "manage upwards".

But before we do, let's take a look at a single word that is key to this whole process: PROACTIVE. Let's see that again in bigger letters...

PROACTIVE

There, that got your attention. Managing upward is a proactive process that helps you and your boss succeed. It helps you stay one step ahead of what's expected of you – and it begins with communication.

PRINCIPLE #1

Keep your manager well INFORMED.

Your manager is ultimately responsible for the success of your team even though he or she may not be intimately involved with the work being done. As a manager yourself, you know how that feels. If a manager feels out of touch or uninformed, things can start to feel out of control. They may get anxious and feel the need to step in and oversee everything, or question your direction, or react emotionally to things they weren't aware of. You can alleviate all of these issues by simply and intentionally keeping your manager informed.

- **Provide the “BIG PICTURE”**

- Give the landscape overview.
- Skip the small play-by-play details.
- Only give details if you have a manager who *needs* the details in order to feel informed.

- **Skip all the bumps in the road along the way**

Your manager doesn't need to hear about all of the nitty gritty problems you have been dealing with in the process. Unless you need their input on a serious or ongoing issue, you show your value as a great manager by keeping the problems off their plate entirely.

- **Have DETAILS ready if needed**

You don't want to bog your manager down with unnecessary details, but do have critical details ready and available to share if needed. This will help your manager feel confident that you have the big picture *and* the details under control.

PRINCIPLE #2

Present problems with SOLUTIONS.

By presenting problems you've already solved, or problems *with* ideas for solutions, you establish yourself as someone your boss can trust with important matters.

Proactive Tip:

Before you rush to your manager with a problem that needs to be addressed, take the time to write out possible solutions. If you have the authority to take the action needed to solve the problem, do so. Then inform your manager of the problem and the action you took to solve it.

Sometimes you need your manager's involvement before you can take action. In that case, take the time to investigate and formulate some solutions that you can present to your boss when you present the problem. *"We ran into some issues with _____, but I've come up with some ideas for solutions that I'd like to get your input on."*

Verbal or Written Communication?

Take a minute to think of your manager's style. If he or she likes to process issues through conversation, present your solution ideas verbally...briefly and succinctly. If your manager processes better (or remembers better) by seeing things on paper, provide a written document with a short outline of your solution ideas.

PRINCIPLE #3

Anticipate your manager's questions and concerns.

Before bringing a situation or problem to your manager's attention, think about *how* your manager will likely think or wish to proceed, depending on the circumstances.

- What questions will she ask?
- What concerns will he have?
- What information does she need?

Thinking through these questions will help prepare you to be part of

your manager's solution. Over time, you earn a reputation in your manager's mind as a **"Problem Solver"**. That's a reputation you want!

Managing Upward for a boss who is just plain difficult.

How do you manage upward with a difficult boss? What do you do when just anticipating your manager's questions and concerns makes you want to run the other direction? You take a deep breath and follow the same principles with one added point.

Anticipate your manager's reaction while keeping *your emotions* in check.

Anticipate your boss's reaction so you can be prepared to keep your emotions in check – even if he or she doesn't. If an inflexible or demanding boss usually reacts to issues with anger and blaming, then you can anticipate the same response to a change in a deadline or other unforeseen issue. Recognizing the probability of your manager's reactions will prepare you *before* it happens and allow you to plan a professional, non- emotional response.

Tips to KEEP YOUR EMOTIONS IN CHECK:

- *Stay cool*
- *Don't take someone else's "stuff" personally*
- *Focus on the facts and not their behavior*
- *Breathe deeply*

Ask Yourself:

■ Think about the interactions you have with your boss.

It may be time to do a better job managing upward if:

- Your manager is frequently asking you for more information.
- You're often unprepared to address your manager's questions and concerns.
- Your manager is overly involved in your work or your team's work.
- You spend more time talking to your manager about problems than solutions.

■ Anticipate sticky situations with a challenging boss

Think about your manager's most common reaction when:

1. A proposed deadline can't be met.

Probable reaction:

How could you respond while keeping your emotions in check?

2. An error was made and a client is unhappy.

Probable reaction:

How could you respond while keeping your emotions in check?

3. Think about a recent work issue that triggered an emotional response from your manager. If you could go back and handle things differently now, what would you do?

Final Thoughts on Managing Upward

COMMUNICATE – ANTICIPATE – BE PROACTIVE

Regardless of your boss's management style, managing upward has the potential to strengthen your relationship. ***By keeping your boss informed and positioning yourself as a problem-solver, you help your boss look good, which in turn, helps you look good. That way, you both win.***

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