



HRSB Consulting

Managing Up:

How to Effectively Manage Your Boss By Susan Bloch



About Susan Bloch

Susan Bloch, Human Resources Executive, works with companies to shape their vision and create a culture that attracts, develops and retains key talent while increasing employee productivity. With 20 years of human resources experience in a variety of industries, Susan is a highly organized individual skilled in problem solving, organizational effectiveness, employee relations, and management coaching and training.

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What comes to mind when you hear the term “managing your boss?” Do you imagine yourself telling your boss what to do, going the extra mile to keep him happy or just doing what it takes to keep him out of your hair? If you aren’t clear about what this term means or never even considered the concept, this tip sheet is your wake-up call. You can gain a great deal from developing the ability to manage your boss and you definitely have a lot to lose if you don’t.

Your relationship with your boss is likely the most important relationship you have at work. A good boss can motivate you to perform, improve your work life and job satisfaction and help you advance in your career. This type of relationship requires good communication and attention. Without properly managing your relationship with your boss, you put your development and success at risk.

Step 1: Understand Yourself

One of the most important skills you can bring to the workplace is a strong sense of who you are. The relationship between you and your boss is one of mutual dependence. You depend on your boss for direction, feedback and support and your boss depends on you for new ideas, hard work and cooperation to achieve the organization’s goals. Both sides have needs and can benefit from working together. Start building a strong relationship with your boss by developing a good understanding of yourself. What gives you job

satisfaction? What upsets you? Are you an extrovert who likes to reach out to others for input and advice or an introvert who likes to work things out in your own head? Are you detail oriented or do you prefer to reach results quickly? Understanding yourself will give you a head start on successfully working with others.

Step 2: Understand Your Boss

Learning to understand your boss is the second part of the equation. Obviously it is harder to figure out someone else’s style than determine your own, but you don’t have to be a therapist or a development specialist to uncover some of the basic principles. Here are some helpful tips to begin the process of understanding your boss:

1. Learn your boss’ management style. One way to do this is by taking the time to watch and listen to what your boss does and says. See how he acts in group settings and then observe his behavior with individuals. Pay attention to how he talks and interacts with various types of people including his peers, secretary and assistants, board members, clients, etc. Does your boss work many extra hours in the office? Does he socialize with other people from work? What communication method does he prefer: phone, emails, and formal memos or in person? Does he like lots of frequent updates or just an occasional

briefing? By observing your boss in various situations, you will get a good understanding of his values and what is important to him.

2. Recognize the areas where your management style and your boss's management style are complimentary and where they diverge. It is your responsibility to strategize how best to capitalize on your strengths, weaknesses and style differences. It's unlikely you'll get the boss to adopt your style. So, in order to have a positive relationship you'll need to be the one who demonstrates flexibility, is able to compromise and shows a willingness to take direction.

3. Don't overlook the importance of little things in your boss's management style. Small things can be very helpful in developing and maintaining a good working relationship. For example, if the boss is a stickler about being on time and starting a 7:30 am meeting on the dot, get there on time (or even a few minutes early). If you arrive even a few minutes late, it may be a problem.

4. Choose your battles wisely and address them one-on-one with the boss, in a confidential setting. There is nothing more fruitless than a smart, skilled manager suddenly embarking on a suicide mission by going head-to-head with their boss on a relatively small issue or wrong approach. Or worse, having them do it in front of an audience. When you have differences to air or problems to resolve, take the conversation behind closed doors.

Wherever possible, meet your deadline; but if unforeseeable problems intervene and a deadline becomes impossible to meet, communicate with your boss ASAP. Waiting to the last minute and hoping for a miracle isn't smart. Prevention is more effective, particularly when the boss may have built an entire project schedule around your deadline.



Step 3: Know what you need from your boss

The type of support you require from your boss will vary with your own experience level and where you are in your career. Below are some tips and strategies for getting what you need.

Experience Level I Strategies

If you are in the beginning of your career, the best boss for you is one who acts as a mentor or coach. It would be very helpful to have someone who would give

you feedback on your strengths as well as areas needing development and who would encourage you and motivate you to do your best. How do you turn your boss into this kind of person? Here are some steps you can take:

Ask for a regular meeting where the agenda is simply, "Tell me how I'm doing and what you'd like to see me work on." During your first year on the job, this meeting should be held once a month. After that, it can be held once a quarter. It doesn't matter if it's a casual lunch meeting or a more formal gathering in the office at 3pm. If your boss is not comfortable with giving feedback, you should prepare a list of questions that will get you what you need. For example, "How did I do on the presentation last month? Please tell me 2 things that went well and 2 areas that could be improved." "What did you like about my sales presentation? How could I improve it?"

Work with your boss to establish quarterly goals you both agree to. Make sure you are both setting the same priorities for your work.

Find a way to share your larger career goals with your boss. Ensure that he knows where you'd like to be in two years, what skills you'd like to develop and what future education you are interested in. At a minimum, you should have this conversation on an annual basis.

Experience Level II Strategies

At this level, you probably don't need or want a lot of managing from your boss. You have sufficient knowledge and skills to do your job well and what you really need is a good understanding of the company's direction and the priorities of your position. To be successful, it is critical that your boss clearly articulates his expectations and that you clearly understand them. In addition, you need to understand your department's priorities and how you can help pitch in when needed. Steps to managing your boss at this level include:

- Ask to be included in appropriate business meetings.
- Seek out opportunities to support your teammates.
- Take a leadership role when possible.
- Never come to your boss with a problem unless you have a solution to offer.
- Get on your boss' calendar once a quarter to review priorities and get feedback on how you are performing.

Experience Level III Strategies

Once you reach a certain level of expertise, your needs in a boss become very different from what you wanted at the beginning of your career. At this point, your boss is there as a sounding board- someone with whom to share ideas, discuss strategies and define priorities.

Steps to managing your boss at this level include:

- Set up a regular meeting schedule at a frequency that supports enough communication so priorities are always clear,
- Make it your business to understand what your boss is working on and how you can support him,
- On an annual basis, ask for feedback on your behaviors and identify what skills you need to develop. Understand what it would take for you to replace your boss.



Tips for Success at every level

Here's a checklist of ideas for successfully managing your boss at any level:

1. When your boss speaks highly about a project, report, organization, etc., learn and use that knowledge to get a sense of what the boss rates as "good" in a variety of areas. Knowing the boss' definition of "good work," including content and process, is very important.
2. Observe which colleagues have a particularly good working relationship with the boss and talk to them. Find out what they think is the best way to work with the boss and get suggestions on how to be successful.
3. Avoid stepping into sensitive areas by carefully observing and talking to colleagues when you are new to a position.
4. Don't speak badly about your boss in public or private. It's okay to disagree, but do so in a professional and respectful way.
5. Make sure you get the information you need. If your boss is not forthcoming, ask for it. Communicate in whatever fashion is appropriate but don't sit back and wait for something to come your way.
6. Learn the corporate culture and use appropriate behaviors.

7. Review your priorities with your boss regularly and stay focused on them. Build credibility by addressing the boss' problems in a helpful and considerate manner.

Learn to read your boss' body language so you know when it is an appropriate time to talk and when it's best not to disturb him.



In conclusion

Managing up is a skill that every employee needs to learn. Recognize that it is YOUR responsibility to build this critical relationship. This attitude will get you the results you want. Understand the boss' priorities, likes and dislikes, sense of urgency and style of communication and target your behavior accordingly. In many ways, managing up is simply having the right attitude and realizing you have the ability to make things better.