

Managing Upwards

How to get your boss on your side

Publishers cut down entire rain forests for books on how to manage staff.

But there are less books on other sorts of management.

Of course we manage people who work for us, but also those we work for and those we work with. We manage their moods, their expectations, their view of us. And since work travels around an organisation, we manage (or don't) the amount that ends up on our TO DO list.

So, what are the golden rules for managing your manager.

Present Solutions not Problems

You have a business problem. You need your manager's decision. You go into his or her office. You can say: "We've got a real problem with x and I haven't got a clue what to do about it." But much better is: "We've got a real problem with x and I need your help. There are some possible solutions but I'm not sure which one is best." In other words, before you rush along, take the time to list possible solutions. If you are completely bereft of ideas summarise the key issues that might help your manager come to a decision. Don't just run in and pass the buck.

Be a Help

This is a slightly different point. Your manager has a manager. He or she also has different tasks/objectives and pressures (from above, below and from colleagues). Your job might be, say, to make a huge number of phone calls a day, meet targets, and pass a record of your calls to your manager. His or her job might be to collate all the information, identify trends and pass this up the line. Think about ways you can make this job easier by what you do.

Communicate as your Manager Prefers to Communicate

If your manager NEVER answers e-mails don't send a 100 a day in the hopes he or she will finally give in. Discover their preferred means of communication; face-to-face, phone, e-mails, short summaries, 100 page reports. Then use it. There are plenty of tips on how to make communication generally more effective. They're useful. But remember you're communicating with a specific real person who may be phobic about phones or unable to understand numbers.

Say No, but Explain Why

Your manager asks you to do some work. You're up to your eyes in it. Don't accept the job then work yourself into exhaustion or miss the deadline. Equally, don't just say no. Say "I've got these other things to do. I can't make this deadline. I could drop this existing piece of work. Which has the greatest priority?"

Saying “No” or missing a deadline makes you a problem: answering in the third way means you’re helping organise work.

Learn to Read the Code

Almost all of us have codes we’ve either inherited or been taught. They give signals of our moods and the actions we expect from other people. The most obvious one is the

“open / shut door” code of managers who have their own offices. Does a shut door REALLY mean “Don’t come in”? Those sorts of rules are very important to a relationship. Invading someone’s “space” whoever they are can cause major bust-ups.

No Nasty Surprises

If something starts going wrong, in all likelihood it will get worse. Let your manager know early. Don’t hope it will all work out. It’s a huge temptation to put off the “nasties”. Don’t give in to it.

You can’t lay down all one-size fits all set of rules for managing your boss. All managers are different....and that’s the final, and most important tip...

Treat Your Manager as a Person

It’s easy to treat them as a position, a job ...or even a nuisance. But whether you like it or not, your manager will have a lot to do with your enjoyment of work and how far you succeed at it. Take the time to use a little Emotional Intelligence (see the article elsewhere on this site) and think about what your boss is motivated by (power, money or genuinely working with people he or she likes) and is interested in. Everybody has pet hates (I had a boss once who loathed the term “customer loyalty”. Use it in a report and he glowered at you for a week or so. Knowing that saved a lot of grief.) Learn them.

Is this being “teacher’s pet”? No. Understanding your boss makes your job easier. It also teaches you the best way to raise issues about their behaviour. Research suggests we’re all less aware how we impact other people than we think – and some bosses will be thankful if you give them constructive feedback.

Others won’t. In that case, maybe you need a new manager,

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