



Special Report

The Secrets of Managing Your Boss

Phil Faris

Sales Leadership Resources



THE SECRETS OF MANAGING YOUR BOSS

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**"Managing your boss does not mean bossing your manager.
It means understanding your boss and managing yourself."**

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Was there ever a subordinate who didn't dream of taking secret control, of slyly manipulating the boss to do the employees will? Well, for the smart subordinate, that dream stays a dream. Smart bosses are hard to manipulate and hard to pacify when they find out you're trying to manipulate them.



But you can take a hand in managing the relationship between your boss and yourself. Like any effort in business, it is based on gaining an understanding of the needs and wants of the person you desire to influence. To do that, there are eight steps you can take:

- Mentally prepare for upward influence;
- Know yourself;
- Know your boss;
- Take responsibility for the relationship;
- Know your boss' goals;
- Know your priorities;
- Build on your boss' strengths; and
- Finesse the power struggles.

Let's examine these one by one.

1. Mentally Prepare for Upward Influence

Put simply, if you don't believe you can influence your boss, you can't influence your boss. Subordinates who are successful at managing upward are observant—they study their bosses, learn their likes and dislikes, and develop techniques for dealing with them effectively. It takes preparation and work, but most of all, it takes belief that you can have some influence.

Before we start planning to manage your boss, explore your beliefs about your ability to influence upwards. If you discover limiting beliefs, eliminate them or replace them with beliefs that are more empowering.

Otherwise, no role-playing, no coaching or daydreaming will have any impact. The limits you place on yourself, and make part of your belief system, will hold you back. But if you know you have potential for power, you can be powerful.

2. Know Yourself

In this case, the command to "know yourself" isn't some spiritual or philosophical prescription. It means consciously being aware of the way you think, the way you talk and act around others. This self-knowledge is the key to understanding how your boss sees you. Knowing how you are

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perceived by others maximizes your ability to handle those people effectively.

Here's one example. Supposed your boss is partial to brainstorming sessions, where the team throws out ideas at random to work toward a solution. You may be the sort of person who is uncomfortable in such a situation (through fear of speaking in public or for whatever reason). The individual who is not self-aware may just sit in silent misery, while the boss wonders why that individual can't contribute to the team effort. But the self-aware person would take action to reduce fear—like making notes before the brainstorming session—and use those notes in the meeting. In such a case, self-awareness leads to an alteration of behavior and a positive change in the boss' perception of the subordinates—and increased power for that subordinate.

To increase your self-awareness, ask yourself the following questions:

- What would my boss say are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the implications of my boss's assessment?
- What actions can I take to change the assessment?

3. Know Your Boss

Just like you, your boss has likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, strengths and weaknesses. In short, **your boss is a human being**—a human being who you must understand in order to influence.

To achieve that understanding, you have to see the world as your boss sees it. To cite one possibility, your boss may loathe memos and minutes—the normal paper flood that can drown any office. You may think it's because the boss is trying to avoid responsibility on the theory that, if it's not in writing, a person can't be held accountable. But the truth may be very different. Perhaps the boss just hates reading and prefers to process information verbally.

Whatever the reason, it is up to you to learn why your boss behaves in certain ways. Once you know why, you can begin developing strategies to

deal with those behaviors.

To gain a better perspective on your boss, ask yourself the following questions:

- How would your management assess your boss' strength and weaknesses?
- What are the implications of your boss' strengths and weaknesses?
- How can I compliment my boss' strengths and weaknesses?

4. Take Responsibility

People who are uncomfortable about trying to change things often fall back on the cliché that it



takes "two to tango," and that a relationship can only be changed if both parties work at it. Usually, greater improvement will result when that happens, but measurable improvement can result from the efforts of one person who is willing to work hard.

Because of stereotyped ideas (based usually on age and sex), many subordinates believe that it is the boss' job to do the managing. After all, isn't the boss a man? Paid more? Gray-haired? What do any of these characteristics have to do with effectively managing a relationship?

Don't wait for an invitation. Start doing something to improve the relationship today. Make a list of five things your boss should do, but doesn't. (e.g., plan meeting agendas, review

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priorities regularly, handle details, etc.). Then, start doing them yourself and you'll make life easier for yourself and your boss.



5. Know Your Boss' Goals

If you don't know where your boss is trying to get to—either on a short-term project or in a long-term organizational sense—how can you possibly have any influence? You can't, because you just don't know what the boss wants. You can find out by using some fairly simple techniques.

Probe for information; ask questions; and if you don't understand something, don't just smile and nod—ask for clarification. Process the information and see how it stacks up against previously stated goals. If there are incompatibilities, point them out. You could learn that goals have changed, or you could become a hero for heading things off before they go in the wrong direction.

When the time is right, ask your boss to discuss the "big picture," so you can really know what the important objectives are. If there's a written plan, ask to see it, or at least the parts that affect your job. When you know what your boss considers really important—and you've shown an interest in it—your potential for influence will rise several notches.

To make sure you're properly aligned with our boss' goals, ask these questions:

- What are my boss' personal and business goals?
- How does my job help my boss achieve his-/her goals?
- How can I better support my boss high priority goals?

6. Know Your Priorities

In any workplace, goals are constantly shifting, so priorities are constantly changing. If you are faced with multiple tasks, you must always know which ones take priority in your boss' eyes. In many organizations, it's not possible to stay in constant touch with your boss (and constant quizzing on priorities might make you appear unsure of yourself), but you must make sure that you occasionally update your boss. Sit down together, review your current project, and describe the priority you've given each.

Your boss is sure to appreciate being kept up to date and will take the opportunity to update you on fluctuations in goals and objectives, allowing you to adjust your priorities accordingly.

To help your boss assess your priorities, ask yourself these questions:

- What projects have the most visibility with your boss' boss?
- What will happen if a project is successful?
- What will happen if it's not successful?

7. Build on Your Boss' Strengths

Many subordinates forfeit their potential for influence by focusing on their boss' weaknesses. Perhaps the boss doesn't always say "thank you" when a job is done. Or maybe the boss tends to micro-manage projects more than a subordinate would wish. By focusing on these annoying personality traits, the subordinate will only wind up building resentment and creating a catalog of reasons for disliking the boss. Such a catalog of grievances will only serve to short-circuit the working relationship.

Instead, focus your attention on things you value in a boss. Often, people who forget to say "thank you" aren't being intentionally rude—they may just be eager to move on and solve the next problem. That's an attitude you can appreciate. And by zeroing in on the positive, you stand a good chance of building mutual self-respect and the interdependence that's at the core of any good working relationship.

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8. Finesse the Power Struggles

To manage your boss effectively, the last thing in the world you want to do is automatically give into conflict. But neither should you try to win that conflict simply by marshaling the best arguments you have for your viewpoint and endeavoring to persuade your boss you are right.



Any good salesperson knows that the key to overcoming objections is not persuading, but understanding. When an objection is raised, learn more about it.

Ask questions to get at the source of the objection—find out whether it's grounded in emotions for facts. When you fully understand your boss' objections by listening actively to them, then you can begin dealing with those objections.

This doesn't mean that you will automatically get your way—perhaps the objections will show you that you've misunderstood a key goal. But the process can just as easily show that the boss originally misunderstood what you said. You'll never reach that point if all you do is argue. A good rule of thumb is to **"listen for understanding before trying to be understood."**

Summary

Managing your boss takes time and energy; so many people question its value. When you consider the alternatives (e.g., changing jobs or suffering in silence) the answer is quite clear. Remember, if you don't manage your boss, your boss will continue to manage you as he or she has in the past. The choice is yours. By using the strategies outlined, you'll find the process less intimidating and your efforts more productive.

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Phil Faris is a business development consultant, coach, speaker and author. He is president of Phil Faris Associates a firm that specializes in helping organizations hire, train, develop, lead and retain the sales talent required to succeed in a competitive marketplace. Phil has developed a reputation as a “performance improvement doctor” for his ability to help organizations improve their financial health by diagnosing performance issues and then prescribing strategies that produce measurable results. He has worked in many key industries with a wide range of clients including: Amgen, Brunswick, Clarke, Dartnell, DeVry, Meredith, PIMCO, Shell Energy, TCI, Waste Management, Zimmer and others.

Phil brings a diverse array of hands on experience to every project having held leadership positions in training, human resources, marketing and sales. As a consultant he has worked in more than 20 industries and has designed and delivered over 80 customized sales, management and leadership training programs.

Phil is the author of the following books: *Hiring Winners*, *Building Customer Partnerships*, *Training Winners*, *50 Activities for Sales Training* and *Upping the Down Side*. He has also written numerous articles on sales, leadership and personal development.

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