

10 Tips for Managing Your Boss

Your relationship with your boss is probably the most important relationship you have at work.

Boss management can stimulate better performance, improve your working life, job satisfaction, workload and work-life balance. Give your boss a hand and reap the rewards.

The old view was that we expected our boss to manage us; nowadays, with the pace of busy working life, the most successful people manage their Boss effectively.

Tip Number 1 **Agree the boundaries**

All of us require a firm boundary to work within. We call this empowering yourself by agreeing the remit you work to.

You both agree the What (Objectives) and you decide on the How the job is completed. Agree the standards and outputs expected and avoid leaving things to chance. Be specific when you agree your Objectives: what exactly must I do and how must it be presented.

Agree reporting lines; who do you report to if your Boss isn't around? Do you make decisions when the Boss is out (i.e. Your box increases)? If so, which decisions? What types of decisions are you required to make in your 'normal' day? When you need the advice of your Boss tell your Boss what you expect from: simply to inform, to decide jointly, to share the risk, to add one criterion, to re-examine the option etc.

How do you like to be managed? Do you like daily or weekly reviews?

What do you like to be discussed and what do you like to be kept out of discussions? For example, I prefer not to share too much about my personal life, so let your Boss know about this as they may fantasise that you listen to their problems and sort out their personal life however you keep yourself to yourself.

Tip Number 2 **Manage your Boss's time**

Whilst your time is entirely devoted to them, do not expect your boss's time to be entirely devoted to you.

Work out in the diary when you need to see your Boss and book in short, focused meetings. Prepare & summarise data and present options, suggestions and solutions to keep these meetings action driven. This links in with knowing what to focus your time on; prioritise what you need to discuss and keep subjects to the important. You want to avoid being the type of person who holds up important projects because you are awaiting a decision.

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Tip Number 3 **Avoid Making Assumptions**

One of the first mistakes I made was to assume my first Boss knew how to manage me to achieve our best as a team. Most Bosses are busy working on their priorities and they forget that one of their key areas of effort should be on us, their people.

Empower yourself by booking in personal development reviews for yourself and steer these meetings by focusing on what added value your Boss can expect by committing to your development.

Another mistake is to think they know more than you do; you may be the expert in the sector, department and organisation. Educate your Boss in the culture of how to do things and what to expect. This will enable a smoother decision making process.

Tip Number 4 **Be a Problem Solver**

Avoid becoming the person your Boss dreads: the moaner whinging about problems and even worse, the member of staff who always dumps problems in their lap.

Develop your problem solving skills. What is the problem in hand? Get into the habit of analysing the data available to gather the facts. Then brainstorm the options you have; you can involve others here to help you eliminate and refine the options. Finally, what input/output do you want from your Boss? Then you can arrange a focused meeting with your Boss to discuss solutions. Use positive words e.g. “Regarding the team away day. I’ve thought through the logistics.”, rather than “There’s a major problem with the transport for the team away day.”

Tip Number 5 **Always deliver**

Always deliver what your promise to deliver.

Trust does not develop overnight and depends a lot on the behaviour of the other person. Both you and your Boss need to be clear in what you want or need to happen and then follow this with action.

Avoid delivering bad news without forewarning. Avoid bad surprises. If your job is to be in charge of a particular area, then it is also to be in charge of bad results and improving them. Involve your boss in discussing and evaluating the risks, so that neither you nor your Boss will be surprised.

Do not promise dates for finishing projects you cannot handle. If you see that too much is asked of you, sit down and re-discuss priorities before proceeding, rather than making yourself a bottleneck. Involve your boss in the process, so it becomes a common priority.

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Tip Number 6 **Develop a relationship based on Trust**

This builds on delivering on your promises. Agree the standards and stick to them. Careless errors and poor quality work will erode their confidence and trust in you as their key person. You may find your remit reduced or eroded in some way which will erode your confidence and trust in *yourself*.

You need also to role model a solid relationship. I know too many people who criticise their line manager, which results in loss of trust if they find out. It is acceptable to empathise with the person, for example:

“I wish your Boss would get their act together and make a decision. What the hell are they playing at?”.

Empathise with “I can understand the difficulties this causes your department however we are exceptionally busy with month end at the moment. What do you suggest we could do to help out?”.

Tip Number 7 **Provide Constructive Feedback**

It is not healthy to keep quiet in any important relationship about things that are not going well. Your relationship with your Boss is a key relationship to work on in life; we spend a lot of time at work and our personal and professional pride depend on it. Both of you need to commit to adapting your behaviour based on constructive feedback.

Develop constructive feedback skills; stick to facts, use examples, state it behaviourally and avoid being personal.

Bad example

“You never make the time for me and it makes it hard for me to do my job.”

Good example

“I realise the Mano project is taking a lot of our time at present, however last week we had to cancel every meeting we had booked. This means Terry is still awaiting my report and I need your approval on 3 items. Can we book a 15 minute meeting in this morning?”

Tip Number 8 **Accept their Differences**

Every individual has their own frame of reference (their camera lens onto the world). This includes our values, beliefs, standards and views on the world. When we learn to care about someone we accept differences and work with them, accepting they may behave or believe in a different way to us.

For instance, my last Boss was very creative and kept interrupting me to discuss ideas and work. I accepted this, as his creativity was the core part of our roles existing; so rather than viewing the interruptions as an annoyance I planned my diary to do work that could be done in this type of environment and accepted his interruptions as an honour.

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Tip Number 9 Increase your Boundaries

Managers often assume that their staff will struggle if given a task outside their comfort zone. Let your Boss know what skills you have and what skills you would like to develop.

Look for projects that interest you or will enhance your knowledge, skills and experience. This includes widening your remit to include more decision making and increased responsibility.

Ask!

Tip Number 10 Celebrate

Make time to celebrate the projects and events that go well. In the business world we often make the time to analyse when projects fail, which is negative psychology.

Use positive psychology in all working relationships and remember your Boss needs a positive stroke too! Provide positive feedback to ensure you maintain the successful team.

Example

“Thanks for giving me the opportunity to travel with you to meet the overseas team. The networking I did and putting faces to names will really help me with my job. I’ve already made a contact for the annual conference to help me with the theme. I appreciated this experience.”.

Conclusion

Aristotle is quoted as stating “*We are what we repeatedly do*”. Commit to managing your Boss and you will be repeatedly maximising your potential.