

The
Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind - the Eclectic Engineer

Broadcast Management

By Jean Kelley

How to Manage Your Boss

[August 2009] Sometimes it seems that calling the Chief Engineer a manager refers to him being in charge of equipment – especially in one man departments. However, there is a whole set of interactions that go on between the engineer and staff ... and especially with the boss. Can you manage your boss more effectively? For some answers and suggestions, please read on:

No matter where you work, you report to someone - maybe even to two or three bosses. And whether you think your boss is brilliant or a bore, the fact is that you have to manage the relationship with your boss if you want to advance your career.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Realize that you are more dependent on your boss than your boss is on you, because your boss holds the key to your short-term future. Not only can your boss release you at any time, especially in today's economy, but your boss can also unconsciously ostracize you by not keeping you in the communication loop and by giving all the desirable projects to others. When your boss senses that communication between the two of you is not going well and situations have not been resolved, he or she will simply go work with your co-workers rather than you.

Therefore, if you do not manage the relationship with your boss, you will not last long in your particular position - either you will get fired or you will quit. Granted, if you work for a large company, you might be able to transfer to a different boss. But even then if you do not know how to manage your boss you could end up merely repeating the same scenario as you did with your former boss.

So before you let a little mismanagement on your part disrupt your career, take some time to learn the keys of "boss management." The following suggestions will get you started on the right path and contribute to a more harmonious work day.

UNDERSTANDING THE GROUND RULES

- **What is good?** To start off, find out from your boss what "good" looks like to him - and to all the others who may be involved in measuring "good."

Whether you report to one person or four different bosses, you need to make sure you're meeting everyone's expectations. After all, what seems good to you may only be mediocre to your boss. Therefore, find out what "good" looks like to each boss to whom you report.

Sometimes bosses do not tell you much and you have to pull it out of them. You could simply ask, "What does 'good' look like on this project?" Or, "If this went exactly like you wanted it to go and it turned out perfect, what would have to happen between now and that time?" As an added benefit, you might even get an idea of the scope of how big that project really is.

If you do this simple step upfront and find out what the expectations are on the project and the timelines, you save a lot of time in the end.

- **Following through:** Ask your boss what kind of follow up he/she wants and what your boss has to have for his/her comfort level.

Many times bosses expect people to be mind readers, simply because they are busy and cannot always go over all the details of a project. As such, your boss might forget to tell you such things as a firm deadline or a required step. And since everyone operates from their own set of realities, the possibility of miscommunication is high.

That is why you need to take the initiative to set expectations for every project your boss assigns you. You need to find out:

- What is the deadline?
- What are my resources?
- What checkpoints or milestones do we want to establish, if any?
- What step or contact person is absolutely critical to this project?

Just as you set expectations when dealing with clients and co-workers, you need to manage the relationship and set expectations with your boss every time.

- **Emulate the boss' playbook:** Examine your boss's style and adjust to that style.

Peter Drucker says there are two key leadership styles: readers and listeners. Which is your boss? The readers want data before you talk with them. The listeners want to talk before they read.

For example, a CEO has a controller who is good with the numbers. He gives his boss elaborate and spectacular reports but that is not what she wants. Every time he gives her a report, she pushes the report aside and starts talking with him. She is not a reader; she is a listener. All she wants to know is the bottom line - "Are we in trouble or not?" So this controller is spending precious time producing materials his boss does not want.

Conversely, if your boss is a reader, you are not going to get a good decision from that person in a quick hallway conversation. Readers cannot make fast decisions on complex issues without data. So unless it is an easy question, they need to think things over and analyze them. And while there are many personality types in the workplace, if you can make this one distinction between the readers and the listeners, you will go far with managing your boss.

- **Speak up when necessary:** Muster up the courage to tell your boss when you feel you have not been fully heard.

Communication has to go both ways for success. If your boss upsets you or misunderstands you, you have to speak up - not from the head, but from the heart. One way to do that is with an "I" message. For example, "I was really upset and hurt by what you said. I interpreted it as _____. Did you really mean it that way?"

Most people want to be heard, yet most do not get heard by their boss. Therefore, it is your responsibility to say when you are not feeling heard. If you are leery of speaking up to your boss, first try this approach on your family members. Practice it in a safe environment before trying it on your boss.

- **Know all the players:** Become aware of other managers' styles, especially when they have a stake in the outcome of your project.

Keeping up with the expectations and styles of multiple bosses can be a fine balancing act. The only way to wade through it all is if you can keep in mind the *one thing* that matters most to each of the stakeholders you have to please. It is too overwhelming to have five stakeholders and think through five requirements for each one.

So either ask each person what is most important to him/her, or figure out what you have observed in each person's behavior that you can use to meet their expectations.

- **Manage Up**

The good news is that no matter how well or poorly you have managed your boss's relationship in the past, you can re-craft your relationship on every new project. Ideally, you want to create a relationship where talking from the heart is the norm, as then confrontation on serious issues will not be difficult.

In the end, it is really about understanding your boss. When you teach your boss how to work with you and hone great communication skills with him or her, your work life will be happier and much more productive.

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Jean Kelley is president and founder of Jean Kelley Leadership Consulting and Jean Kelley Leadership Alliance. She works with corporate leaders all over the world to achieve their highest potential. With her Alliance, Jean has helped more than 500,000 businesspeople enhance their careers. She is the author of "Dear Jean: What They Don't Teach You at the Water Cooler," and "Get A Job; Keep A Job Handbook." For more information, please visit www.jeankelley.com.

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