



Effectively Managing Your Boss

By Barry K. Zweibel

No disrespect intended, but it appears that lousy management has reached epidemic proportions in the Information Technology industry. Bad bosses can suck the motivation, creativity, enthusiasm, productivity and health right out of decent people trying to do a good job and earn an honest wage.

Not that employees don't sometimes try to scam the system, but that's a different story!

So let's be fair here. Bosses have a lot to put up with - like YOU, for instance! (It's possible that some of those things on your last performance review might actually be true, you know.) And they have to deal with their own set of very challenging pressures and priorities - conflicting organizational objectives, peer relations, functional challenges, their bosses, etc. So it's no wonder they often get distracted from:

- Assisting you in prioritizing your work.
- Validating your assumptions.
- Providing you with missing information.
- Offering meaningful (and timely) feedback.
- Connecting you with the rest of the organization.
- Making sure you're on the right track before it's too late.
- Helping you align the necessary organizational resources.

It's all this potential, then, that makes managing your relationship with your boss perhaps the single most important ingredient in determining your ultimate success. Consciously working with your superior to obtain the best possible results for you, your boss and the company is a definite Winning Strategy. But how does this work, exactly?

One way is to help your boss see that you are looking at issues from his or her perspective - not just from your own. So if your boss is saying NO to your killer idea because there are insufficient funds, don't just grouse. Ask your boss what's needed to move forward and how you can help. If it's an explainable variance memo that's needed, then write one. If the project is seen as too big for some reason, start smaller. If the project is considered

too small to have sufficient impact, show how you can ramp up its scale. Whatever the boss' concerns, address them - meaningfully and quickly. Because by solving the boss' concerns, you subtly influence him/her to work more on yours.

Another key is in improving how to complain (read: communicate). Most complaints are caused by broken commitments, stated or otherwise. Therefore, when making a complaint, it's essential that you are able to:

- Clearly and crisply state your complaint and its impact without getting defensive or aggressive. ("We're running into problems and looking bad in the organization because I'm not getting information I need to do the job.")
- Specify the real or implied commitment that was broken. ("We haven't met in almost a week now, even though we agreed on daily updates.")
- Articulate how the responsible person can resolve your concern, being as specific as possible. ("We really need to meet today to debrief - even for just 15 minutes - so this project can run more smoothly.")
- Ask for their commitment to follow through as agreed. ("So you agree to meet with me at 4pm today and based on our conversation determine how frequently it's appropriate for us to debrief? I find it very helpful to understand how you're thinking about this matter - I can make far better decisions that way.")

If your complaint is properly addressed, be sure to say, "Thank you." If it's not, say, "Thank you for trying. Now what else can we do about this problem?" And remember, by basing your complaints on broken commitments, you're maximizing your impact and minimizing everyone's discomfort.

You can also use this commitment-based approach to keep your bosses (and coworkers) in line on an ongoing basis. Routinely:

- Ask your boss to make specific commitments to you - no matter how small.
- Remind your boss that he or she is making a COMMITMENT to you.
- Follow up when your boss ignores or forgets that commitment by reminding him or her of the broken commitment and requesting an apology.
- Do all of this with a professional, respectful and responsible tone.

It's just a fact of life that "bosses will be bosses." You can lessen the probability that your boss will make bad decisions that affect you and increase the probability of your job satisfaction by effectively managing your boss/employee relationship. It takes a little practice, but it's definitely worth the effort.

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