

# Managing Your Boss



To improve and/or re-build one's relationship with a boss; to correct a misunderstanding and build trust



Review the tools and complete the preparation check-list; have the discussion; adjust your approaches and behaviors as needed



If awkwardness or distance exists between you and your boss, if you do not know how to manage up, or if your boss rated/evaluated you poorly



Anyone who has a boss at any level in the organization



“...understand the place from which your boss - or for that matter, any one of your colleagues - is coming from. Nothing is more validating and affirming than feeling understood. And the moment a person begins feeling understood, that person becomes far more open to influence and change.”

*Stephen Covey*



Schlesinger, L. (2003).

It doesn't take a wizard to build a better boss.

*Fast Company*, June/July, pg. 102.



Cautions:

- Failure to be clear of your intentions
- Poor timing for the conversation
- Appearing as a complainer

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## Do You Know Your Boss?

If you believe that you cannot change your boss, you are off to a good start. The only person you can change is yourself. So, a new and vivid understanding of your boss will lead to some possible new approaches that you can take to improve your relationship. Think over the following 10 issues to see how well you understand your boss. Choose any topic that strikes you and note the opportunities waiting for you. Focus on two or three areas for improving your attitude and behaviors and see what a difference it makes.

| CIRCLE |    | SELF-EVALUATION TO GAIN UNDERSTANDING OF A BOSS  | OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES ON MY PART  |
|--------|----|--|---|
| Yes    | No | 1. I am clear on my boss's priorities, worries, and major challenges based on his/her agenda items, meeting choices, emails, moments of impatience or anger, calls taken, people he or she meets often, and time allotments. I know what my boss wants to achieve. I know the political network in which my boss must operate. | Learn the issues by a direct question and/or observation, and link <u>your goals</u> and proposals to these priorities. It is fine to ask: "What kinds of things do you worry about?" or "What do you like most about your work?" or "How does my work align with your priorities?" or "What is most important to you?" |
| Yes    | No | 2. I am clear on his/her values (customers first, teamwork, direct honesty, precision, speed, loyalty, openness, etc.).  | Consider ways to adjust to these values without compromising your own.  |
| Yes    | No | 3. I know my values conflict with my boss's values.  | Serious value conflicts are sometimes beyond compromise and one must either speak up or move on.  |
| Yes    | No | 4. I know the management style of my boss (broad or narrow directions, hands-off or micro-manager, introvert or extrovert, decisive or indecisive, practical or theoretical, slow to act or fast, structured or flexible, etc.).   | Specific and resolute styles make someone predictable. Do I make the most of the positive aspects of my boss's style and minimize the weaknesses? Can I focus on the content of what he or she says and not their style?  |

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|--------|----|---|---|
| Yes    | No | 5. I have a sense of my boss's ambitions, hot buttons, power, successes, and motivators (passion for work, status needs, fast track or slow, etc.). | Am I interested in making my boss successful? If so, how do I show that in a genuine manner? Do I adjust to his/her speed? Do I aggravate the 'hot buttons'? Can I learn the best ways to approach my boss (time of day, method, length, alone or with others, etc.). |
| Yes    | No | 6. Am I in disagreement with my boss about anything?  | How do I handle my disagreements? Do I voice them to others and complain? Is there a way I can re-frame the disagreement and live with it?  |
| Yes    | No | 7. Do I know how to build trust in the relationship?  | Sometimes it is best to ask about this issue directly with a question like: "What do you need from me, or what must I do for you to trust me?"  |
| Yes    | No | 8. Am I clear on my boss's expectations of me, my teamwork, and my results?   | Do I need to re-charge my skills? Come with solutions to problems? Quantify my results? Improve my peer relationships? Speed-up? Say: "Tell me what you want."  |
| Yes    | No | 9. Am I clear on what I might learn from my boss?   | Clarify the strengths of your boss and what it is you may gain from some coaching or mentoring on a specific topic.   |
| Yes    | No | 10. Have I ever given specific positive or negative feedback to my boss?  | Consider legitimate opportunities, such as 360 reviews, to provide upward feedback.   |

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## Red Flags of Dangerous Bosses

Recent attention to corporate scandals has raised thinking about the mental and moral health of executives. Fortunately, only 1% of us are moderately psychopathic, but this designation falls on some notable bosses, like Leona Helmsley, Al Dunlap, or Andrew Fastow.

Boss behaviors like these will send you running to HR and/or a headhunter:

- No sense of guilt or remorse; never admitting mistakes
- Selfish and callous use of others; enjoys hurting others; publicly insults others
- Superficially charming; insincere; coldness covered by falsely emotional play-acting
- Inflated sense of self-worth; egocentric; ‘me-me-me’
- Lying; manipulation; distortion of truth
- Lack of empathy in word or action
- Failure to accept responsibility for their own actions; never apologizes; blames

On the other hand, there are bosses that Michael Maccoby calls Productive Narcissists, like Steven Jobs or Bill Gates. These bosses excel as innovators and want to change the world but disdain criticism and do not understand or employ empathy. They do best with a diligent operational second-in-command person at their side.

Don'ts:

- Broadcast or bad mouth your boss's weaknesses, mistakes, sins, etc.
- Imitate your boss versus standing on your own
- Sabotage your own work to irritate your boss
- Show unprofessional behavior about a disagreement you have with your boss
- Leave conflicts unresolved
- Waste time and energy being angry versus redirecting your efforts to change yourself



- Arrange a time to meet with your boss and communicate relevant issues from the checklist of 10 issues
- Continue to improve the relationship by communicating
- Move on if values and style are irreconcilable