

Managing 'Up'

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Whether we are at home or at work, we are challenged with two types of people to influence: those we have authority over (our children, pets or workers we supervise) and those who have authority over us, or at least are peers (our spouses, bosses, coworkers etc.) While there have been many self-help books about how to manage our subordinates and parent our children, there is finally starting to be more attention to how to manage our relationships with our bosses and coworkers.

The most powerful tools are the simplest. We all know that good communication, negotiation skills, and conflict resolution are good tools. What else is there to know?

One important strategy is to understand the needs of the person above you. What do they need to do to satisfy their supervisors or run the company? These are the issues on their priority list. Mary and Tom are supervisors at the same company. Mary has been told that absenteeism is too high in her department, while Tom has been told that his team needs to cut down on production errors. Each will be focused on that issue in addition to all their other responsibilities. Consideration of a supervisor's needs will also help you choose how to present information in a helpful manner, including your best suggestions for solutions to problems. Mary and Tom don't need or have time for all the raw

data. Present Mary with a summary of the top 10 reasons given when people call off work; give Tom a quick tour of the machine that everyone is blaming for the production errors.

All of us also have a personal style and emotional needs that influence how we get things done. Understanding the personality of your supervisor can help you work better with him or her. Mary is a detail person. Thanks to your report, she follows up on the attendance concerns by bringing hand sanitizer to the floor and insisting on doctor's excuses for absences. She appreciates frequent progress updates on projects, so you bring her a chart showing the improvements in attendance. Tom prefers to delegate projects and is pleased when you volunteer to form a QA committee. He'll likely follow up in a month, but he won't spend an hour discussing it unless the results are unsatisfactory. After looking at the old machine that was breaking down, he appreciated your handing him two bids for a replacement and made the call in 30 seconds.

A boss who is experiencing a personal crisis may not speak about it at work, but may appreciate it if you overlook unusual irritability. Mary just found out that her mother is going to be recuperating from surgery at her house, and Tom's son is habitually skipping school. If they seem a bit distracted or short today, don't take it personally. Obviously, timing is key in approaching anyone, so during stressful times, prioritize what they need to attend to.

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