Managing Up

Strategies for Cultivating Effective Supervisor Relationships

Michelle Armstrong
Head of Data Management and Scholarly Communications
Albertsons Library – Boise State University
michellearmstrong1@boisestate.edu
https://works.bepress.com/michelle_armstrong/
The Issue

Why is the supervisor-employee relationship so challenging?
There is a power differential in the supervisor–employee relationship.
People are miserable when the supervisor-employee relationship is dysfunctional.
There is limited discussion and research around the topic of managing up.
A few realities about leading that we don’t usually talk about.
Your boss has a boss.

In most cases, supervisors are also employees and deal with the same kind of pressures of being an employee that you do.
Your boss is a human being and has human emotions and flaws.

Supervisors are just as susceptible to things like insecurity, making mistakes, and being preoccupied with problems outside of work.
You and your boss have different perspectives.

Your focus may be on your performance and place within the organization, while your supervisor’s focus is on the organization and the resources it needs to function.
Your boss may know everything about your job or nothing about your job.

A supervisor’s professional background will influence how they interact with you.
Your boss is not a mind reader.

It can be difficult to communicate with your supervisor for a variety of reasons, which can be frustrating for you, but it can also leave them with an information gap.
How does managing up help?
How does managing up help?

- Managing up changes your experience within the organization.

- Managing up increases your self-efficacy and psychological capital.

- Managing up helps change the organization itself.
Employees with high psychological capital performed better at their job.
~ Avey, et al. (2011)

“High-quality supervisor-employee relationships are positively correlated with employee job satisfaction.” ~ Stringer (2006)
How do you manage up?
Build trust
Learn about your supervisor’s leadership and management style

✧ What is their professional background? Training? Expertise?
✧ Are there race, gender, age or other demographic factors that influence their management style?
✧ What’s their communication style like? Email, meetings (structured or informal?), interpersonal communication?
✧ What performance factors do they care about? Customer service, high numbers, employee satisfaction, completing tasks/goals, etc.?
✧ Do they have an agenda?
✧ What are their strengths? Weaknesses?
✧ How do they deal with stress? Set backs? Conflict?
✧ Who do they influence? What’s their position in the larger organization? How do others get along with them?
✧ How do they get along with their supervisor?
Care and learn about your organization

- What is the organizational hierarchy of your library? Can you find an up-to-date org chart listing all the people and their positions?

- What is the larger organization structure that your library is a part of?

- Are there guiding documents that provide a larger vision and picture for your library?

- What other groups or departments does my library work directly with and why?

- Are there internal and external opportunities available to my organization?

- What is my library’s budget, how is it organized, and who manages or controls that budget?
Make things easier.
Check your attitude.
Don’t try to game the system.
Manage yourself
Use your words wisely!
Success
Improve your own managerial performance.
Become your own best advocate
Care about and develop your career plan.
Think strategically to solve problems.
Be smart about unethical, illegal, dangerous, or mean behavior.
Any questions?
In conclusion...
Resources
