



MANAGE YOUR BOSS: HOW TO BUILD A GREAT WORKING RELATIONSHIP

An Executive Book Summary by Sarah Sotvedt

SUMMARY: Steps to Success' *Manage Your Boss: How to Build a Great Working Relationship* is a book true to its name. Written for anyone – those with difficult bosses and those with great relationships – it provides step-by-step guidance for improving one's employee-supervisor relationship. The book starts with a quiz, which allows the reader to analyze what type of relationship they have, as awareness – the books teaches – is key. This is followed by eight sections, each of which describes important pieces of the relationship improvement process.

The book's sections cover a broad range of areas, from setting boundaries and addressing conflict to setting up a mentoring relationship. In each section, the concept is introduced through a description of the main problem or priorities, followed by instructions, common mistakes and general tips. With an overall focus on the idea that all relationships can be improved through expanded toolboxes, stronger communication and increased awareness, this book is a useful tool for anyone interesting in exploring how they communicate with their supervisor – or as one.

HOW IT WORKS

The book and the EBS work similarly:

Take the Quiz:

In order to find out how to work with this relationship, understanding is key. Here, you can learn more about what your relationship with your boss looks like.

Take the Steps:



Review the available information about any or all of the eight specific areas of focus. Provided for each is a set of steps and general tips for what to do or avoid doing.

ABOUT THE SERIES



Steps to Success is a book series designed to provide guidance to those in the workforce, with a particular focus on those in or looking towards management positions.

Though little information is available about the series itself and authors are not listed, a review of the collection makes it clear that this series covers a wide array of topics useful to those looking to expand their leadership toolkits. Areas covered include balance and health, conflict resolution, career development, negotiation and more.

EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP

How well do you manage your boss?

Answer the questions and work out your score, then read the guidance points.

How do you feel about asking your boss for help?

- a) Confident that I'll get what I want
- b) Confident that they'll listen
- c) Worried that I'll seem like a failure

How do you feel about delegating upwards?

- a) Not a problem!
- b) Sometimes it's unavoidable
- c) It's not really my place

How well do you and your boss communicate?

- a) We clash fairly regularly!
- b) Very well
- c) We don't really 'get' each other

How do you react to criticism?

- a) I hate being criticised
- b) I welcome it—as long as it's constructive!
- c) I find it disheartening

To what extent do you feel you can influence your boss's actions?

- a) Totally
- b) Sometimes
- c) Not at all

How would you describe your network at work?

- a) I make sure I know all the right people
- b) I have a network of trusted colleagues
- c) I don't tend to network; I don't have time for chatting

To what extent do you feel that your boss is working with you to further your career?

- a) Not much—it's not in his or her interests to do so
- b) We develop my skills and build my experience together
- c) I didn't know bosses were supposed to do that!

How well do you think your boss stands up for you in appraisals and salary reviews?

- a) I make sure they know what I want them to say
- b) Well—it's important for the team that I am happy!
- c) Not as well as they could do if I spoke to them more about my ambitions

How would you deal with a problem with a colleague?

- a) Forcefully—they are being unprofessional
- b) I may mention it to my boss if nothing comes of my attempts
- c) I wouldn't

a = 1, b = 2, c = 3

Now add up your scores.

- **9–13:** You know what you want, but have quite an aggressive way of asking for it. See Chapter **1** for tips on communicating assertively, without being aggressive. If you have a problem with personality clashes, Chapter **5** should help you to reach a mutual understanding. You don't lack self-belief, but it can come across as arrogance and actually damage, rather than help, your public image. See Chapter **8** for a positive approach to improving your chances of promotion.
- **14–21:** You appear to have a balanced relationship with your boss, which is a great step towards a successful career. Of course, though, you will want to become a boss at some point: by following the advice in Chapters **1**, **2**, and **4** you will learn how to command more respect both at home and at work. Chapter **8** will then help you to hone your skills and progress in your career.
- **22–27:** You know that you have the skills to progress in your career—the trouble is, nobody else does, least of all your boss. You should learn to communicate more effectively—Chapters **1** and **2** show you how, while Chapter **4** explains how you can delegate upwards. It might be useful to find yourself a mentor; Chapter **7** explains the best way of going about this.

CHOOSE A STRATEGY

COMMUNICATING ASSERTIVELY IN THE WORKPLACE:

The employee-supervisor relationship can "make or break" one's workplace experience. Much of the success of relationship-building is determinant on strong communication. This means assertive communication within the work environment is vital. Assertion allows for communication that honours the needs of you and your boss in the name of collaboration and compromise.

DEVELOPING YOUR INFLUENCING SKILLS:

An advanced form of communication, influence is using one's skills and abilities to encourage others to think or act in a desired manner. This can mean taking the time to understand situations and parties in order to use the knowledge of what matters to them to your advantage, thereby persuading them to meet or support your goals.

WORKING FOR SOMEONE YOUNGER THAN YOU:

While this situation can sometimes lead to conflict and challenging dynamics, it is one that can also be embraced and lead to new and expanded horizons for all parties.

ORGANISING YOUR TIME:

Time is always in demand, and organizing yours carefully is paramount to workplace and general success. Work-life balance, staying in the present and making calculated choices are all notably important pieces in the organization puzzle.

DELEGATING UPWARDS:

Influencing your boss to work on your behalf, share your load and take on your desired outcomes requires careful maneuvering. Though hierarchy allows mainly for downwards assignment of tasks, the ability to delegate to your boss is an important part of gaining support strategically when needed.

SURVIVING PERSONALITY CLASHES:

While varying personalities can work well together and are essential to a diverse workforce, they can sometimes lead to problems. These problems occur in the presence of a clash of values, leading to both parties feeling the need to fight for a "win" to validate what they believe. Such issues should be addressed as soon as possible to avoid escalation.

MAKING YOURSELF PROMOTABLE:

Personality traits, commitment, knowledge and sense will all be considered when you are up for promotion. Relationship-building is key, and the relationship with your boss is one of the most important to build.

WORKING WITH MENTORS:

Developing a mentor-mentee relationship can be one of your most valuable workplace endeavors. Finding a mentor who believes in you and will actively help you improve and succeed is key to getting the most out of this opportunity.

✓ Tricks of the Trade: Mentors

- Look beyond your boss
- Communicate your goals
- Recognize the benefits
- Look for compatibility
- Establish clear timelines
- Exercise confidentiality

WORKING WITH MENTORS

Step 1: Think Through Some Common Questions About Mentoring

It is vital to find a trustworthy mentor who will provide free guidance out of a genuine desire to see you succeed and achieve your goals. Consider having multiple mentors for different needs and being one yourself.

Step 2: Decide What You Want Out of a Mentoring Relationship

Know what you are looking for – such as promotion, networking or skill-building – as this will help you to identify the right mentor for you. Most importantly, be prepared to communicate this for the benefit of both parties.

Consider Process

Choosing a mentor is much like choosing an employee. It is very important to find someone who will meet your goals, is trustworthy and, most of all, fits you.

Step 3: Look for Candidates

Similar to finding an employee, there is a process to the mentor search. Explore opportunities through work and the community, and ask for recommendations from colleagues.

Step 4: Interview Your Candidates

Once a list of candidates is established, have exploratory conversations that allow you to get to know each other and determine compatibility and fit.

Step 5: Establish Groundrules

Groundrules will help the relationship to thrive. Discuss boundaries, needs, how to monitor progress, how to address conflict, scheduling and other specifics important to your relationship.

Step 6: Consider Being a Mentor Yourself

Being a mentor is just as valuable as having one. This will allow you to share your experience, help others and lead to long-term benefits such as skill-building and adding to your network.





✓ Tricks of the Trade: Getting Along

- Talk to the right people
- Take responsibility
- Act courageously
- Don't take sides
- Listen actively
- Practice empathy
- Address conflict proactively
- Be professional & objective



SURVIVING PERSONALITY CLASHES

Step 1: Know What Causes Clashes

These can stem from a number of places, including: personality clashes, confusion of boundaries in roles, difference of opinion over a decision, or irrationality.

Step 2: Work Out Whether it's Worth Tackling At All

Addressing conflict is important, but ensure it is worth it. Weigh the potential benefits and consider what role you have played in creating the conflict.

Step 3: Focus on What Really Matters

Similarly to deciding whether it is worth tackling, prioritizing what you need may help you to focus on priorities. If the situation can be overlooked, consider the possibility of doing so.

Step 4: Tackle the Issue Appropriately

Should you choose to address the conflict, introduce it through clearly stating your understanding of the conflict and the reasoning behind your boss' opinion. Empathize with where your boss comes from and indicate how it affects you. Explain how a change could have positive effects and be attentive to your boss' reaction.

Step 5: Don't Get Drawn Into 'Playground Politics'

Personality clashes often lead to a "win-lose" or "sides" approach. This can be detrimental to the environment, so ensure you stay focused on the root causes of the issues and consider your part in any conflict.

Step 6: Agree the Way Forward

Use compromise, collaboration and succession to reach an agreement, and keep open communication after it is reached. Dispel tension where possible, especially with humour.

Step 7: If All Else Fails, Walk Away

Sometimes agreements cannot be reached. Though one should try as hard as possible to engage in amicable discussion and while third parties are an option, sometimes it is necessary to leave the matter unresolved.



✓ Tricks of the Trade: Obtaining Promotion

Practice networking

Be open to change

Expand your toolkit

Build relationships

Try to be humble

Maintain flexibility

Step 3:

Develop Good Interpersonal Skills

Self-confidence and honesty apply here, as demonstrating these will show you hold true to your beliefs. Combine this with a diplomatic spin and you will excel in this area.

MAKING YOURSELF PROMOTEABLE



Step 4:

Meet Business Objectives

Promotable employees take an interest not only in the goals of their roles but of the success of the business as a whole. Learning about other parts of the business will solidify this clear interest in overarching objectives.

Step 5:

Build and Lead Teams

Dependent on the ability to understand each member's driving forces, encourage two-way feedback, communicate clearly and monitor progress, leading teams is an essential skill for those looking to climb their corporate ladders.

Step 6:

Learn to Manage Transition and Change

Change management is a vital part of leading. Celebrate and support change or, if in strong disagreement, express concerns clearly and gently, in a constructive manner.

Step 7:

Build an Effective Network of Champions or Sponsors

Building a network of colleagues who support you based on your own merit is a great way to lay solid groundwork on the "who you know" section of the path to promotion.

Step 1:

Ensure That You are Considered

It is important to carefully put oneself forward, being clear about goals, desires and needs. Finding a mentor, creating a development plan and observing promotable role models all are great ways to start your journey towards promotion.

Step 2:

Build a Winning Personal 'Brand'

How you operate, change and use your skills are all part of your brand – ensure this brand fits the higher ranks of the organization. "Derailment factors" such as the inability to change, lead or relationship-build may hinder you.

ORGANIZING YOUR TIME



Step 1: Conduct a “Time Audit”

Awareness is key to deliberate time management. Reviewing how you actually spend your time – not how you hope to – will give you the groundwork to determine whether changes should be made. A test is included with your book.

Step 2: Be Aware of Your Choices

Making sure your choices match your values and that your time is being spent the way you want is important. Setting boundaries may be necessary if you feel your time is not being spent in the right places.

Step 3: Plan for Lost Time

People tend not to plan for the possibility of schedule changes or to book time for activities, alterations or breaks that inevitably cause setbacks. Incorporating these into the schedule will increase the chances of it working effectively.

Step 4: Be Prepared to Change Behavioural Habits

If time is an issue because you do not have enough, you may be partly to blame. Saying no to requests or reorganizing and reprioritizing may be necessary to finding balance.

Step 5: Prioritize and Plan Ahead

Once you are aware of where your time is going and have made changes, be proactive. Set timelines, goals and priorities; schedule yourself; delegate where needed; and, most importantly, take responsibility for what you do take on.

✓ Tricks of the Trade: Delegation

Stay calm

Be thankful

Speak rationally

Focus on outcome

Communicate logic

Prepare and practice

Play to your audience

Focus on the “business-critical”



✓ Tricks of the Trade: Influencing

Be committed to your convictions

Be aware

Be an assertive communicator

Be prepared

Be cognizant of your boss’ needs

Be committed

Be an active listener at all times

Be realistic

Be interested in mutual satisfaction

Be flexible

✓ Tricks of the Trade: Time Management

Define goals

Take small steps

Use tools (carefully)

Maintain awareness

Expect the unexpected

Identify and discuss barriers

DELEGATING UPWARDS ↓

EBS

by Sarah Sotvedt

Step 1: Tap Into Your Boss's Values and Motivations

Your boss is likely motivated by “power over people” or “relationships with people” and knowing which can help you to be influential. The first is identified by status and standing while the latter by relationship-building – choose your approach based on what matters most to your boss.

Step 2: Consider Your Priorities – And Your Boss'

Request clarification of reasoning behind tasks and, if needed, request assistance or suggest re-prioritization. Remember that you both have goals and needs, and allow these to guide the conversation.

Step 1: Aim for a Win-Win Outcome

- Don't make it about the win. A winner means the presence of a loser, but the art of negotiation involves believing that everyone can “win” or meet common goals.

Step 2: Prepare the Ground

- Be prepared, by knowing what you want and how to convey it, researching any related information, and familiarizing yourself with the views of others. Choose your setting carefully. Outline your goals, reasoning, common ground and understanding of your boss' needs clearly. And, finally, emphasize your desire for a win-win outcome.

DEVELOP YOUR INFLUENCING SKILLS ↓↑

Step 3: Persuade Your Boss to Take on the Activity

Ensure your boss understands and commits, through the following: understanding motivations; carefully choosing the setting; assertive, clear communication; highlighting gains for both sides; active listening; requesting follow-up; and expressing gratitude.

Step 4: Stay Confident and Assertive

Confidence is key in eliciting a positive reaction. Remember that if the request meets organizational goals and is reasonable, it is appropriate.

Step 3: Communicate Assertively

- Listen actively, use “I” statements, pay attention to cues and body language and be confident and respectful. Be proactive in identifying challenges by considering how your points will be perceived and how you might improve your communication of them.

Step 5: Close the Communication

- Use communication skills to know when to keep pushing and when to take a break or end the dialogue. Once an outcome is reached, confirm the decisions in writing and monitor to ensure follow-through.

Influencing Skills, Step 4: Use a Variety of Influencing Techniques

Logical Argument:	Use rational arguments with intellectually based parties. If values are at the forefront of the matter, this approach may be ineffective.
Inspiration:	Painting the big picture of the benefits of the proposed outcome may help achieve “buy-in” from a boss focused on strategic vision.
Favour Exchange:	Trading and bargaining to achieve an outcome is reasonable, provided the commitment is full on both sides.
Compromise:	This allows both parties to obtain desired goals and likely relinquish others, which is acceptable, provided everyone is comfortable with the agreement.
Concession:	In line with the idea of choosing one's battles, this tactic sees one party surrender in the name of concession owed.
Blackmail/ Threat:	Based in intimidation and fear, this is likely to achieve short-term results but is not worth the negative long-term relationship impact.
Power:	Based in dominance, this method can lead to achieving one's goals but at the cost of negative relationships and lack of “buy-in.”
Heartfelt Appeal:	A thorough and accurate comprehension of values allows for empathy and understanding.

COMMUNICATING ASSERTIVELY

Step 1: Choose the Right Approach

“Read the room” by making a choice that fits the circumstances and parties involved. Make sure to communicate in a way that moves the conversation towards your goals but recognizes the unique needs of the situation.

Step 2: Project a Positive Image

Taking a positive spin will help you to be in control of the situation, as it shows commitment to positive forward movement. Reflecting on a past situation in which you displayed the image you now want to project to your boss will help you to successfully recreate that image.

Step 3: Encourage Others to Take You Seriously

Assertive communication with colleagues will help to develop your reputation, which will be recognized by your boss. Attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal communication cues, taking ownership of your communication using “I” statements and reflecting the styles of others to gain understanding will enhance your image.

Step 4: Use Positive Body Language

Focus on the following: active listening (empathize, make eye contact); physicality (stand confidently, match stature, breathe deeply); and openness (embody honesty, ask open-ended questions).

✓ Tricks of the Trade: Communication

Be careful	React consistently
Avoid aggression	Act on a case-by-case basis
Read the room	Do not be resentful
Use positive talk	Exercise active listening
Take it slow	Consider your body language
Practice	Find training & tools



COMMUNICATION STYLES

Aggressive:
You win and
others lose

This approach leads people to feel uncomfortable, angry or defeated. Responding to this approach includes recognizing your rights, attempting to regain control and, sometimes, taking some time away from the conversation.

Passive:
You lose and others win

This approach allows its executor to feel like the victim. Responding to this approach includes encouraging the person to speak up, to ensure they have the opportunity to and also meet the responsibility to contribute.

Passive/Aggressive:
You lose and hope others lose

This approach leads to negativity through its lack of interest in positive goals and its habit of causing disharmony. Responding to this approach includes challenging the person to convey their thoughts on a decision, which requires them to clarify concerns or take a stand for or against.

Assertive:
Everyone wins

Focusing on compromise, this approach allows for the best possible outcome for all parties, where possible. By matching the communication style of others, taking control of the situation in a direct and confident yet respectful manner and seeking collaboration, assertion responds to the aforementioned approaches by attempting to work with them, combat them and address conflict positively.

WORKING FOR SOMEONE YOUNGER

Step 1

Be Open to New Ideas and Ways of Doing Things

Though experience is a great teacher, it is important to be open to the changes a younger boss may introduce. Address concerns about the changes through “reverse coaching” (asking open-ended questions to elicit analysis and justification), which is a positive way of bringing forward potential issues.

Step 2

Be Ready to Learn

There is always more to learn, and this is to be remembered at any age and stage. In particular, young bosses may bring a high level of technological literacy worth learning from.

Step 3

Don't Make Assumptions

Confidence in a young boss may be making up for insecurities about their place in an older workforce. Hear their often uninhibited ideas and young but powerful voice before deciding their worth.

Step 4

Be Proactive in Your Communication

It is your responsibility to schedule time to communicate, and ensure you bring information up in a respectful, clear manner, engaging in two-way dialogue.



Step 5

Be Prepared to Coach Your Boss

A young boss may benefit from your experience, but will respond best to guidance through the open questions approach, as it is less instructional and allows them to work through situations. It is also imperative to remember that they are ultimately responsible for their work and must not rely on you.

Step 6:

Keep Things ‘Light’

Not taking comments personally will help to build and maintain a positive relationship. If you feel a comment is condescending to your age or experience, address it through clear communication or even humour – depending on the situation.

Step 7

Help Your Boss Succeed

It is natural to feel threatened in times of change or challenging situations, but it is important to move forward positively. Ultimately, if your boss succeeds, you and your area do as well, so ensure that you root for and celebrate your young boss' success.

✓ TRICKS OF THE TRADE:

YOUNG BOSSES

- *Exercise respect*
- *Coach in reverse*
- *Continue learning*
- *Celebrate teamwork*
- *Appreciate diversity*
- *Work for end over means*
- *Communicate openly*
- *Believe in your boss*



Discussion Questions

- How would you define your relationship with your boss?

- Which of the eight steps do you most identify with and why?

What type of communicator are you? How can you improve your communication skills?

- Are you a strong relationship-builder? What key action items could help you to improve?

- How important is it to manage your boss? What difference does it make?

- How do you address conflict with your boss? With your colleagues?

- Which steps will make you a better leader, if applied generally to your work?

- Are you a boss? If so:

- How did this book affect you?

- What did you learn that could strengthen your relationship with your staff?

- Which steps could help you to coach more effectively?

References



Application

The steps designed to help you manage your boss have a far wider application than the book's title suggests. Because the skills used to manage upwards are similar to the skills used generally in areas such as management, leadership, conflict resolution and relationship-building, the steps suggested help to build the toolkit of any worker. Additionally, the tips would be particularly useful to those who play both roles – boss and employee – as the book provides insight into how certain actions taken by bosses may elicit negative reactions from staff.

In terms of the field of education, the book is particularly applicable. Those who work in education typically manage a variety of groups, from students to parents, bosses to staff. Building great working relationships – an action which doubles as the book's sub-title – is vital to the success of working with the aforementioned groups. In short, the relationship-building skills described in this book are widely applicable, and educators should be especially cognizant of their relevance to every facet of their work and lives.

Review

Steps to Success' *Manage Your Boss: How to Build a Great Working Relationship* takes an interesting spin on relationship-management, a key area of emotional intelligence. Focusing solely on the employee-supervisor relationship, this book suggests that both parties have the power, ability and responsibility to make changes.

One of this book's best qualities is that the information is widely applicable. Though geared towards employees, it would be a useful tool for employers looking to become more aware of how they act as bosses and how they could improve relationships with staff. Many of the concepts can also be applied to relationships outside of this scope.

Though it provides some useful information, it can be argued that the book does not cover all of the areas vital to relationship management. In particular, its focus on individual facets of the relationship neglects the importance of focusing on the root causes of problems. Additionally, the book relies heavily on the employee's need to change, sometimes neglecting to recognize or address the need for change from both sides. While this is reasonable for a book geared to the employee, it does not leave room for advice about working through relationships with bosses adverse to change.

Overall, the book offers some helpful tips for those without significant backgrounds or knowledge of conflict resolution and relationship-building, but its lack of coverage of some areas and its fairly basic, simplistic steps leave something to be desired for the crowd more familiar with these subjects or with more complex supervisor-employee relationships. As such, this book would be recommended most highly to bosses struggling with high turnover or employee satisfaction, as the read may be revealing.

Manage your boss: How to build a great working relationship (Rev. ed.). (2010).
London, GB. A & C Black Publishers Ltd.