

What Does it Mean to Manage Up?

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Introduction

When you think of the word “managing”, automatically, you think of how you are managed at work by your immediate supervisor or other superiors in the organisation. In addition to this kind of managing, there is a term called “managing up”, making its way into business headlines. Having a healthy, positive relationship with your boss makes your work life much easier, [it is also good for your job satisfaction and career](#). It cannot be denied that some managers do not make it easy, and too many managers are overextended, overwhelmed, or in some cases, incompetent. Even if your boss has some serious shortcomings (many people do), it is in your best interest, and it is your responsibility to make the relationship work.

According to Reynolds (2020), managing up is the process that involves making one’s superior’s job easier. While most employees are used to being given duties and tasks from their managers, no one can deny that even the managers themselves may get overwhelmed and may need help with a few tasks from time to time. Instead of this being a one-way communication channel, managing up helps there to be a two-way communication channel that is more effective.

This article will explore what exactly it is to manage up, how to do it, and the potential benefits that it may bring to the organisation.

What is Managing Up?

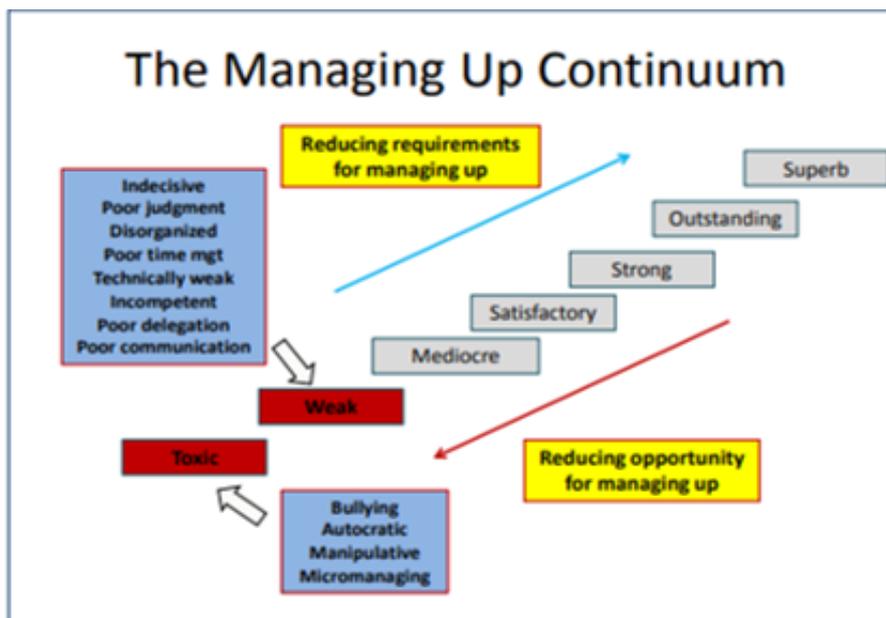
Before going deeper into what managing up is, it is essential to note that managing in itself does not mean bossing someone around. The art of management goes beyond assigning tasks and duties but also creating a relationship with other team members. This means managing up should not be looked at as a way to “seek revenge” on a manager, as this is not the case. Turk (2016) outlines that managing up creates a win-win situation where everyone, including the organisation and project, wins.

As mentioned previously, managers do get swamped at times, and working as a team requires subordinates and managers to work together well. This can not be achieved if there is an unhealthy atmosphere in the group or team. The importance of forming some relationship comes into play here. When a manager finds it challenging to handle all the pressures simultaneously, they should be able to

reach and out seek help from others. It sounds easy to do, but in reality, it may not be this simple. In some cases, pride may lead the way, preventing the smooth flow of completed work to take place.

As a subordinate, it becomes crucial for you to be a team player, to know how to help the manager with the work that needs to be done. Yes, some bosses may not be the easiest people to work with, but what do you do if you have a boss or manager like that? Manage up. It does not help to job hop every time you become fed up with the personality or attitude of someone who is leading you. If that was the case, most people would have a new job every other month.

When you think of managing up, the diagram below may help you understand what it is and what may be needed from you.



(Performance Solutions Group, n.d.)

Benefits of Managing Up

Having the ability to manage up successfully will ensure some wins for you and your boss. Reynolds (2020) helps us understand what the potential benefits of managing up are. Reynolds (2020) notes the top three ways that managing up can be of use:

Managing up boosts employee engagement as it is a catalyst for employee engagement. A culture of managing up could, in turn, help boost engagement levels — resulting in a more empowered team.

This establishes positive employee-employer relationships, whether helping a new manager or someone from above can help you improve your relationship with your supervisor. They will hopefully notice your hard work and compensate for your proactive efforts.

Managing up increases productivity levels because improved engagement levels, together with employee-employer relationships built on trust, would automatically result in higher productivity levels.

The Harvard Business Review (2017) outlines some additional ways that managing up can help the individual.

- Coping with micromanaging, conflict-averse, or generally incompetent bosses;
- Partnering with your boss for the benefit of your organisation and department;
- Selling your ideas up and across your company;
- Making the most of your boss's influence;
- Establishing a shared vision and commitment;
- Juggling multiple bosses' priorities;
- Working with a new boss

How to Manage Up

Flaxington (2015) highlights the top seven ways in which you can successfully manage up in your organisation which are: matching the behavioural style, being a proactive communicator, accommodating weaknesses, doing the best in your job, keeping a good attitude, reacting appropriately and understanding the ranking order in the organisation. These ways of managing up will be unpacked below:

1. Matching the behavioural style – If you can, try to conform to them. If your boss wants a daily update on what has been done and what to do, then do it. This does not mean that you cannot suggest a better way of doing this but always remember to use the right tactics. Turk (2016) mentions that one of the worst mistakes you can make is to assume you know what your boss expects. Many bosses do not outright spell out their expectations, and the burden of discovery

falls to you. Together, you and your boss need to set realistic expectations that you both agree on. They include expectations on schedule, costs, and the final product. The emphasis is on “realistic.” Setting unrealistic goals that cannot be met puts pressure on everyone and may strain a relationship.

2. Be a proactive communicator – It is crucial to ensure that the communication channel is two-way. Good communication skills are the basis for being able to succeed in almost every situation. Communication with the boss can be verbal or written. Some bosses are readers, meaning they prefer to receive information in written form. Others are listeners, meaning they like to get their information verbally. Flaxington (2015) explains that listeners need to hear the information first and consume a written version later. Readers need to get the story on paper first to have some time to digest and understand the issue before meeting to discuss it. If you want your ideas to be heard, understood, and acted upon, make it easier for your manager to understand by communicating in a way which they are most comfortable with.
3. Accommodate weaknesses – One thing to always remember is that we are all human beings regardless of the titles or positions we may hold. If you know you have a disorganised boss, instead of constantly complaining about it, it helps both of you to stay on top of things. If your boss is often late to meetings, offer to start the next meeting for them. Just like how you may have areas of weakness which you may need your boss’ help with, they may use yours as well.
4. Do the best you can in your job – Very often, people will often start to decrease their performance because they feel entitled to a bad boss. This is not a good move to go with. You are coming to work every day to produce results and not create enemies. If you are unlucky, this may work against you. Keep doing the best that you can whenever you show up for work.
5. Keep a good attitude – At the end of the day, it is always good to keep a good attitude at work. Once the day is over, you can go home and complain to your spouse or friends all you want, but stay upbeat and engaged when in the office or workplace. You never know who is watching or listening.
6. React appropriately – If you have a “mean” boss, it is essential to note that such people get their power from people who are afraid. If your boss is a yeller, criticiser, or judge, be sure to stand firm. If you are doing the best job you can do, keep your head held high and don’t give in to bullying. Ask questions, try to understand, and work to diffuse a difficult situation instead of cowering or responding in anger.
7. Understand the ranking order in the organisation – Remember, the work that you do is kept between your department, and the greater part of the organisation may come to know what happens there. If your boss is highly-regarded and well-liked, this means that the chances are high that they manage up well too. Understand what is happening so that you do not become the problem at the end of the day. There is indeed something to learn within everyone.

Conclusion

Working with people can be difficult as we are all different, and our outlook on things may differ

greatly. Always remember to give off your best no matter the kind of boss or manager you may be faced with. The biggest reason for you being at work is to produce good results. Take time and evaluate how you can make your working environment better and the relationship you may have with your superior. The seven ways of managing up highlighted in this article may be an excellent place to start to see what you can do as an individual in cases that may require managing up.

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