

Figuring Out Your Boss

Figuring out your boss is essential to doing well as a manager and being able to lead up.

Expectations

1. When starting a new job, meet with your boss to ask these questions:

- Are there any problems I should know about?
- Are there any ongoing projects with deadlines coming up in the next few months?
- What do you see as the most important projects, products, or functions of my department?

2. Define assignments from the beginning by asking your boss:

- What's our top priority on this?
- What is the deadline date?
- What format do you prefer?
- At what point should I check in with you?
- How should I keep you updated?
- What calls are mine to make and what calls are yours to make?

Asking your boss to elaborate and clarify inadequate instructions can make the difference between survival and success.

3. Seek answers to the following questions:

- Does your boss like for you to be creative and take initiative?
- Does your boss like to solve problems or have solutions brought to him/her?
- What should you never do because your boss hates it (pet peeves)?
- What should you always do because your boss loves it?
- Is your boss a morning person or a night owl? How does this affect your work?
- What are your boss' main strengths?
- What are your boss' main weaknesses?
- What pressures in the workplace affect your boss and the way he/she interacts with others?
- What personal pressures or problems affect your boss and the way he/she interacts with others?
- Does your boss like to have consensus on major decisions, or is simple obedience enough?
- Who are your boss' allies and enemies (so you can avoid stepping on the wrong toes)?

Priorities

1. What is the organization's overall purpose, and what are the organization's priorities?
2. What are your boss' top priorities?
3. What are the key issues your boss is facing?
4. What is your boss' biggest challenge?
5. What is your boss most worried about?
6. What is your boss complaining about?
7. What are your boss' career goals, and how can you help him/her achieve those goals?

You can only be effective if you deliver services that meet the critical needs of the organization's leaders.

Communication Style

1. What tone of conversation (formal or informal) puts your boss most at ease?
2. Does your boss like to engage in small talk or just want the facts?
3. Does your boss like to discuss things at length or be brief and to the point?
4. Does your boss accept positive and negative feedback or want to hear only pleasant things?
5. Does your boss share information freely or protect what he/she knows?
6. What verbal and nonverbal clues does your boss give when he/she is in a bad mood?

Dealing With Your Boss' Bad Moods

1. Remember that bad moods can come from situations totally outside work. Even when the bad moods are work related, they aren't necessarily about you.
2. Don't escalate the bad mood unnecessarily. Ask yourself what part of your business can wait until later, especially unpleasant business.
3. Ask yourself what you can do proactively, either professionally (solve a problem on your own) or personally (saying something cheerful or sharing a good joke), depending on the nature of your relationship.

Reporting Format

1. What reporting format does your boss prefer for particular situations:
 - Face-to-Face
 - Written
 - E-Mail
 - Voice Mail
 - Combination
2. How often does your boss want to meet with you?

Memos, voice mail, and e-mail bolster the flow of communication, but making a point to see your boss in person engenders the confidence that you are indeed ready for action under his/her direction.

For representing your capabilities and requirements to your boss, there is no substitute for frequent face-to-face discussion and debate.

Bosses are often hard to approach in the middle of the day when phones are ringing, meetings are being held, and things are going wrong.

Spending time with your boss before or after work, when only you and your boss are there, is a good idea. Watch your boss' daily schedule and arrange to be at work during some of the boss' extra hours.

Talking with your boss is easier when only the two of you are around, and your relationship with your boss is crucial to your managerial success.

Find out all you can about your boss' background:

- Family Background
- Work History
- Education
- Awards and Honors
- Professional Memberships
- Geographic Origins
- Hobbies

Any points of personal connection with your boss can help build the relationship.