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## Building Better Rapport with Your Boss

Most companies do their best to select people for management roles who are qualified and effective leaders. At some point in time, however, you may find yourself in a situation where you and a supervisor seem to be at cross-purposes. While in some cases the issue may be minor—a difference

in personalities, for instance—at other times you may have serious concerns about your ability to work effectively with a particular individual.

This uncertainty can affect your ability to do your job well, which may ultimately cause you to question your job security. Your goal should be to address the issue proactively, focusing first on those elements of your working relationship with your manager that are in your control. Here are some suggestions.

**Don't jump to conclusions.** What seems like a major conflict is frequently a simple misunderstanding. For instance, you may take it personally when your boss doesn't respond immediately to your memos. What you may not know is that he or she has been so involved in evaluating the finan-

cial impact of an upcoming acquisition that there hasn't been time to get back to anyone on projects unrelated to the deal. Try to give your supervisor the benefit of the doubt until you have all of the information.



**Share some of the blame.** Even if you're convinced you've done everything possible to remedy the situation, be open to the possibility that you might be contributing to the problem. Do you publicly challenge decisions? Are you complaining about your manager openly with colleagues? Do you compare the individual to his or her predecessor? Look at your own actions and attitudes, and determine the steps you can take to resolve the tension.

**Talk to the person.** Most people don't want to be bad managers.

Often they're just so focused on other aspects of their jobs—such as achieving bottom-line objectives, submitting reports to executives and board members, developing long-term business plans—they don't realize they're making poor connections with their staff.

Consider scheduling a one-on-one meeting with your manager to address your concerns. Start the discussion on a positive note, and pay careful attention to how you phrase your comments. For example, instead of telling your boss he takes too long to provide approvals on assignments, soften it with: "I really appreciate all of your recent feedback on the e-commerce initiative. Because our current review process is so detailed, however, any delays can result in missed dead-

lines. Can we discuss ways to streamline procedures?"

**Learn to adapt.** You'll feel more in control of the situation if you make an effort to minimize or prevent the most common problems. If your boss is indecisive, for instance, make strong recommendations when seeking approval on a project. Offer several suggestions, and then explain why you think one is the best option. Reassure your supervisor that you're confident about your analysis and that you've done your homework.

**Stay productive.** Dwelling on the negative is unproductive and demoralizing. Instead, focus on doing your best work. See if there are ways you can address or improve upon areas that are a source of friction between you and your boss. You can't control your boss's actions, but you can control your reaction to them.

**Seek guidance.** If your own attempts to improve the situation with your boss have been unsuccessful, and the conflict is affecting your job performance, confide in a colleague you trust. Ask the person how he or she has responded to difficult situations in the past. In particular, see if he/she has advice on working with your current manager. If your manager's behavior is unethical or inappropriate, talk to someone in your human resources department.

**Know when it's time to move on.** Sometimes problematic relationships with supervisors can't be resolved. Ask yourself two key questions: What do I stand to gain by remaining in the position, and can I adopt coping mechanisms that will enable

me to manage through difficult situations? Your answers will help you decide whether to stay or pursue other opportunities.

Bad bosses are usually exposed by rapid employee turnover. Chances are, you aren't the only one who has had problems. Unfortunately, sometimes it takes losing good employees before a manager is replaced. Do what you can to work it out, contact others if it's truly a bad work environment, and know when it's time to get out before your self-esteem suffers.

In the end, the question of whether or not you can work for a difficult boss comes down to your own personality and tolerance. Even if your supervisor is receptive to your feedback, it may take time for him or her to make the desired changes. Keep a positive attitude and be patient. By taking the initiative to work with your boss on resolving difficult issues, you can improve your relationship and productivity. ■

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