The CHANGE AGENT℠
Solving People Challenges

Managing Upward: Creating Working Partnerships
by Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

Research indicates that 85% of employees terminate due to conflicts in the boss-employee relationship and in a Robert Half International survey, executives were found to spend a month per year dealing with personality conflicts. This may explain why employers place more value on the candidate's personality than any other factor during the hiring process. Since the boss-employee relationship is such a tenuous one, how can we best manage that relationship?

Samuel Culbert and John McDonough wrote the book Radical Management: Power Politics and The Pursuit of Trust. They found that trust is the key to managing politics in an organization and that the way to develop trust is by building respect for individual differences. In a trust relationship a person can relate to another's interests even when they disagree. The relationship is based on mutual understanding instead of mutual dependency.

We need to recognize the boss-employee relationship is not like the parent-child relationship in that the burden of managing the relationship does not fall entirely on the boss. In managing this relationship as employees, we have three basic choices: to change our boss, change our environment, or change ourselves. We have the most control over ourselves, yet seem to search for ways to change or blame our boss or the environment. It's important to recognize we can rarely change our boss, and if we are not willing to change our environment, the most likely option we have is to change ourselves.

One key to understanding and managing the relationship with our boss is to try and understand what makes our boss "tick". What are the boss's pet peeves? How do you know they are angry? satisfied? In presenting your ideas to your boss, are they interested in all the details or just the bottom-line? Do they prefer competition or cooperation? E-mail Patti@thechangeagent.com and ask for a copy of the Boss Questionnaire.

Often, we present ourselves and our ideas as we would like them to be presented to us, when in fact, the key to managing someone is to try and best meet their needs not ours. A suggestion might be to observe someone who really seems to get along with your boss -- what does that person do that makes them so successful? Often, we are too close to the relationship to be objective and by observing someone else we gain ideas we can use in the relationship.

Here are some of the most common partnering barriers and solutions:

Barriers #1-2: Interruptions and Delegation Issues
1. Hold bi-weekly meetings.

2. Hold stand up meetings.
3. Utilize team logs*
4. Keep an interruption log and analyze it.
5. Change your physical environment.
6. Encourage your boss to utilize "quiet time." Set up a department-wide "Quiet Time" each day that no one internally is allowed to interrupt others, take phone calls, or meet. It is a designated time for project work. Imagine 1-2 hours/per day where you could actually work!
7. Be assertive and learn how to say "No"
   a) Acknowledge your boss' request
   b) Give reason why you can't or negotiate time frames or resources
      "My problem is..."
   c) Provide alternatives
      "Could we consider..."

*A team log is a communication strategy. Have a file folder for every person on your team (or one for those people with whom you frequently interact) Anytime you have a question for your boss or someone else on your team, write down the question or information that you need. Put it in their file folder. This strategy will lessen how much you interrupt yourself (which is controllable). When one of them interrupts you (which you can't control), pull out their file folder and ask the questions or obtain the information you need from them. At a specific time of each day or when you have a lengthy list of things you need from people, find those people and get your answers. It's ideal if you can get your team to agree to use team logs and have agreed upon times to meet and exchange information.

Barrier #3: Changing Priorities - When you don't know what your priorities are or your boss changes priorities frequently, you may be frustrated by feeling a lack of accomplishment in your job. Here are a couple of strategies for you to consider:
   (1) Be assertive and ask your supervisor when your boss changes priorities.
   (2) If there are no priorities, develop a sense of what the priorities should be based on your knowledge of your company's goals and mission.
   (3) Be flexible if there is a legitimate cause or reason for the change in priorities.

Barrier #4: Lack of Information - Information is power and the lack of it greatly lessens our chance of doing an effective job. There are several ways we can try to gain access to information from our supervisor.
   (1) Keep going back to your supervisor and let him/her know upfront that you will need the information.
   (2) Be sincere. Share your feelings of frustration with your supervisor and ask if there is anything you can do to get access to the information needed.
   (3) Do "status checks" and follow up when you don't hear from your supervisor.
   (4) Anticipate the lack of information from your supervisor, and build in time when planning projects for your supervisor's response time.
   (5) Utilize e-mail to help facilitate information sharing.
   (6) Ask to have a copy of your supervisor's management staff meeting minutes so that you

can get a better sense of the big picture.

For more ideas, check out Patti's book: Managing Upward: Strategies for Creating Working Partnerships. *Patti Hathaway, Certified Speaking Professional and author of 4 books, is known as The CHANGE AGENT. She works with organizations that want to make change work and with those organizations that want to change their customer service culture. Patti provides customized keynotes and workshops. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her websites: www.thechangeagent.com and* www.bankingsecrets.com *for information on her speaking services or to receive her complimentary e-mail newsletter.*