Managing Up:
Strengthening Relationships with our Supervisors
Andy Ceperley, 28 April 2009
Managing up is the process of consciously working with our supervisor to obtain the best possible results for **us, our supervisor**, and **our organization**.
Fitting In & Standing Out
Relationship Realities

- We are both human
- Our happiness at work is largely up to us
- Our relationship with our boss should not be confused with friendship
- Our boss may welcome the opportunity to mentor us
- Our professional success is a positive reflection on our boss
- We can always learn something from the relationship we have with our supervisor
- We often have an opportunity to teach our supervisor
- Our boss needs our supportive efforts to make the work easier
Understanding our boss
“If we want someone to understand what we have to say, we must learn to speak their language, rather than expect them to learn ours.”

Richard Knowdell

*Building a Career Development Program*
Supervisor in action

- Mix of qualities
- Pressure from above, beside, and below
- Motivated by some priorities over others
- Expresses joy
- Exhibits frustration and disappointment
- Addresses conflict in a certain manner
- Receives largely filtered information and processes that information in a particular fashion
- Level of inclusion in the day-to-day
Finding the rhythm in our relationship
What we both need

- Regular feedback
- Agreement on preferred communication (e-mail, drop-in, scheduled meetings)
- Awareness of tangible and implied expectations
- Avoidance of boss’s hot buttons
- Appropriate balance between big picture and detail orientation
- Owning our mistakes
- Deploying our strengths to overcome boss’s weakness or time constraints
Tips on managing up
Suggestions from the Field

• Continue to improve our “threshold” skills (the basic job)
• Address conflict privately
• Find opportunities to exchange pleasantries
• Show a genuine interest in the broader mission of the office (beyond our duties)
• Don’t go over our boss’s head
• Develop an agenda for our regular meetings
• Provide a “heads-up” of upcoming problems
• Suggest solutions to problems
• Ensure that communication spans beyond the “what’s in it for us”
• Connect our priorities to supervisor’s big picture
• Anticipate requests (becoming go-to people)
• Under-promise and over-deliver
The quality of your job performance is an important lever in achieving a better relationship with management. When you earn respect for your performance, you gain power and influence along with it. Your recommendations and decisions carry more weight. You become more valuable to the organization.

Michael and Deborah Dobson

*Managing Up*
Additional Reading

- *Effective Followership* (govleaders.org/dynamic_followership.htm)
- *Managing Up: 59 Ways to Build a Career-Advancing Relationship with Your Boss* by Dobson and Dobson
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