

Managing up is about how to manage your boss. Why do you need this skill and how is it done?

## Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

### Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

#### Vocabulary

1. .... to let go of
2. .... empathy
3. .... frustrated
4. .... to flatter
5. .... resentment
6. .... gossip
7. .... to manipulate
8. .... not going down well

#### Definition

- a. not being positively received
- b. a feeling of anger because you've been forced to accept something unfair
- c. casual conversations about other people that might be unkind or untrue
- d. feeling angry, upset or impatient because you cannot do something
- e. to praise someone in order to please them, sometimes in a way that is not sincere
- f. to control or influence someone to your advantage
- g. to stop thinking or worrying about something
- h. the ability to understand other people's feelings and problems

## Managing up

Your boss, and your relationship with them, has a big impact on your working environment and sense of job satisfaction. But although learning how to manage your boss is an important professional skill, it is one that is not often discussed. This article explains what managing up means, what the benefits are and how to do it.

Nicole loves many things about her job – she loves the responsibilities she has, she gets on well with the members of the team she is leading, and she appreciates the working environment she has. The only thing that keeps her awake at night is worrying about her boss, Peter.

Peter joined the company as manager of Nicole's department only four months ago. He had previously been working as a manager in a different industry and is less familiar with his new business environment. Methods that he used before are not going down well with members of this new department and an atmosphere of resentment is building in the team. Nicole feels Peter is not getting the best out of his team and thinks his lack of background knowledge about the business is leading to poor decisions.

So what could Nicole do? She could:

- (a) join in the gossip against Peter,
- (b) complain about Peter to his managers,
- (c) do nothing and hope that Peter quits his job, or
- (d) manage up.

Options (a) and (b) might create more tension and build an even more negative working atmosphere, and option (c) is likely to cause Nicole to feel frustrated and dislike her job. Fortunately, there is a proactive option that Nicole can take: she can choose to manage up.

Managing up is the process of managing your manager. It involves learning how to work well with your manager and developing a positive relationship with them. It does not mean falsely flattering your boss or manipulating them to do what you want. It is more about putting yourself in their position, understanding their needs and then using the skills of a good manager to help support them.

Author of *Managing Up*, Mary Abbajay, suggests that people with difficult bosses first need to let go of the anger and replace it with empathy and understanding. By trying to put ourselves in our bosses' shoes, we are able to better understand their challenges and their choices. Then from a place of calm, we can try to identify and prioritise the problems. What skills do they lack as a manager? How could they make better decisions? Are there differences in working styles and how do they affect the team?

Once we understand the issues, we can then think of strategies to manage up. For Nicole, this might involve finding the right way to communicate these problems to Peter. Or it could mean providing him with the information he needs and helping him to see the talents of the people in the team. Managing up could also mean adapting her working style slightly to fit her manager's. And in some cases, it might even involve taking on more responsibilities and covering for the manager in areas that they need help with.

Most importantly, the skill of managing up is about developing a healthy and positive relationship with your boss. Not only will this allow you to better understand their values, their goals and their point of view, but it will also open up communication channels so that they feel like they're able to come to you for support. You're not just helping your boss by doing this. You're also developing important professional skills, creating a more positive working environment and taking positive steps for your own job satisfaction and career.

Nicole's story reflects many of our realities. In fact, one study showed that 65 per cent of workers would choose a new boss over a pay rise. However, with the skill of managing up, we can all try to make our workplace a more satisfying and enjoyable one. What's more, it's a good opportunity to improve our own management skills and career prospects in the process.

Sources:

- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rodgerdeanduncan/2018/05/26/why-managing-up-is-a-skillset-you-need/#61dc467637fd>

- <https://hbr.org/2015/01/what-everyone-should-know-about-managing-up>
- <https://www.themuse.com/advice/10-ways-to-get-your-boss-to-trust-you-completely>

## Tasks

### Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. Nicole and the people in her department are unhappy about the way their manager, Peter, works.	True	False
2. One reason why Peter's working methods are not well-received by his staff could be that he does not know enough about the way they work.	True	False
3. Nicole could help the situation by complaining about Peter to his bosses.	True	False
4. Managing up is about ignoring the problems you have with your manager.	True	False
5. We can build a better relationship with our managers by trying to empathise with them.	True	False
6. The majority of workers say that they would prefer to replace their boss than to have an increase in their salary.	True	False

### Task 2

Circle the five best answers.

Which of these are examples of managing up?

- Make connections with people who also have a problem with that manager.
- Say positive things to your manager, even if they're untrue, so they will like you.
- Try to imagine yourself in your manager's place.
- Avoid complaining or talking about the problems you have.
- Find a way to talk openly to your boss about the problems you have.
- Build a good relationship with them so that you can control their decisions.
- Provide the manager with the information they need.
- Adjust how you work or how you communicate to fit their style.
- Offer support and find ways you can help that manager with their responsibilities.
- Criticise the manager for being unable to manage well.

### Discussion

Do you have any tips for improving your relationship with your boss?

## Answers

### Preparation task

1. g
2. h
3. d
4. e
5. b
6. c
7. f
8. a

### Task 1

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True
6. True

### Task 2

c, e, g, h, i