



presents

exec outlook series

Managing Up:

**How to get ahead and work effectively
with any type of manager**

Managing Up:

How to get ahead and work effectively
with any type of manager

Introduction

In a survey in early 2014, Ivy Exec uncovered that 67 percent of senior professionals were unhappy with their jobs, and the primary cause of their dissatisfaction was the management and leadership of their company. The majority of American workers also do not trust their managers, according to a recent survey by the American Psychological Association.

While 95% of the respondents in Ivy Exec's survey indicated that they would seek other employment, Ivy Exec [mentors](#) and [career coaches](#) have seen that unfortunately, for many professionals, the cycle of dissatisfaction and mistrust tends to repeat itself at a new job.

“Senior professionals are more empowered than junior-level professionals to break the cycle of professional dissatisfaction brought on by poor leadership,” said Elena Bajic, CEO of Ivy Exec. “To gain control of the situation and prevent bad managers from impeding your advancement, you need to effectively manage up.”

Managing up simply means creating a relationship with your manager and leadership that benefits all parties. This applies whether your manager is easy-going or difficult, competent or ill prepared for his/ her job.

Some of the benefits of managing up include:

- Increasing your overall engagement—and satisfaction—with your job
- Improving your odds of getting promoted
- Raising your profile throughout the company

Ivy Exec has identified 4 situations professionals commonly encounter in the work place that offer lessons on how to manage up.

Scenario 1: The Micromanager



“I've been working for more than 15 years, and am a director with five direct reports. My new VP insists that I report to him about almost everything I do, and he interferes with my decisions. I feel very frustrated, and frankly, feel disrespected, as well. I love my company, but what can I do to get out from under his thumb?”



“Micromanagers struggle a lot with trust; the only person they feel they can risk trusting is themselves,” says Alexandra Sleator, Ivy Exec Career Coach. “A micromanager can be encouraged to trust competencies, if not actual individuals.”

Adopt a non-threatening attitude of curiosity and use “soft” language to ask why he is putting your work under a microscope. For example, "I was wondering what I might do that would increase your confidence in my abilities?"

Having the conversation in a neutral setting – in a nearby coffee shop or during a walk - as Dan Pallotta, entrepreneur and TED talk speaker suggests, can help diffuse the tenseness of such an open and honest conversation.

Establish a check in and decision-making process. Remember, this is not personal. Your manager is not questioning your decisions, but everyone’s decisions except his own. Establishing a transparent process will give him a greater sense of comfort with your abilities, and save your sanity.

Over time, as he feels he better understands how you run your department, the micromanager will feel more comfortable and give you more breathing room.

Scenario 2: The Unsupportive Manager



“I’ve been working at a large company since I got my MBA five years ago. I’ve gotten great feedback on the projects I’ve managed. But I haven’t been promoted while my colleagues with less impressive results have moved up. I think it’s because I don’t have anyone in ‘my corner.’ What do I do?”



“Be direct with your concerns, but convey a tone of genuine willingness to do whatever is needed, rather than one of blame or victimhood,” advises Sleator.

First establish whether your manager is supportive of your promotion agenda. Don’t assume it is clear that he or she is aware of your ambitions. Tell your manager that

you've noticed other people getting promoted, and ask: "I'm wondering what it might take for me to be promoted? Do you have any suggestions?" This gives your boss significant latitude to answer. If your manager answers helpfully, then you know he is in your corner. If not, you need to develop a promotion strategy that does not hinge 100% on the direct support of your manager.

Identify alternative support sources that will help you advance at the company, and ask them for assistance. For example, ask people you have good relationships with in your company to send emails to your manager that showcase your contributions. Find out who, other than your manager, has decision-making authority regarding your promotion, and engage them in discussing your promotion prospects.

Scenario 3: The Disconnected Manager



"My direct manager doesn't seem to know I exist. I've been on his team for more than three years, but hardly get any feedback. I work really hard, but routinely get assigned less visible projects. However, I see that he has developed a strong rapport with other members of the team. What can I do to build my relationship with him and gain more visibility?"



"The boss has been able to develop trust with a few of the team members, but not—yet—with you. You want to start a dialogue that builds your relationship," recommends Sleator.

First see if your perception of "invisibility" is accurate. Get a one-on-one meeting with your manager, and start with the opening gambit: "I feel I have been working hard and contributing. Is that also your perception?" With that question, you are really asking what he has noticed - or not. This will validate if you are correct thinking your boss doesn't know you exist.

Your next step depends on that reality check. If your boss indicates your work has been good, this is your opportunity to open up the dialogue: "Considering these achievements, would you agree I'm ready to take on more?" and proceed to discuss more interesting assignments.

If your initial question elicited a vague response, or no sign at all that your manager is even aware of your contributions, try another approach. Ask if you might update him on what you have been doing.

This is a non-confrontational way to make him aware of you and allow you to succinctly -- but powerfully -- bring him up-to-date. Engage him on what he thinks of your

accomplishments and then... Ask for more!

Scenario 4: The Emotionally Volatile Manager



“Two years ago I started working at a great company, but my boss is making me miserable. She changes her mind frequently and often lashes out at the team. Last week, it was my turn. She yelled at me about a mistake (I admitted I made one) in front of the entire team. I don’t want to quit as I love the work and my team, but I’m not sure how to handle her.”



“Here is a boss who lacks self-trust and is insecure, which explains her volatility. Her outbursts are a reflection of the self-anger she experiences,” says Sleator.

Understand her point of view and respond only to her valid points -- not the emotional ones. In her way, she is trying to communicate, however ineffective and unpleasant. By ignoring the anger, and focusing on the underlying issue that is driving her frustration, you should be able to diffuse the fiery situation. Hopefully, understanding a bit more about what's making her tick will also make it easier to tolerate her outbursts.

Become a better communicator and you will be marked as a leader. Chances are that your manager’s poor behavior has been publically noted, as well as others’ reactions to it. If you respond emotionally, adding fuel to the fire, your image may be negatively linked to hers. Conversely, if you rise above the situation constructively, your skills will be noted in a positive light.

Conclusion

As Tolstoy wrote, “Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” However, the essence of managing up is the same: verify perceptions, calibrate agendas, and establish a relationship that will bring satisfaction to both you and your manager.

- Attempt to understand the reasons behind why your direct manager is behaving in a way that is not aligned with your expectations. Remember, most of the time, it’s not about you personally.
- Establish a non-confrontational dialogue to diplomatically raise your concerns and “reality check” your perceptions of the relationship.
- Guide your manager’s behavior towards a process that fits his or her agenda, as well as your own, while making your life easier.

About Ivy Exec

As a career resource company for high achieving executives, Ivy Exec provides unparalleled career building and job seeking resources – from a 1-on-1 mentorship program with industry veterans and consultative advisory services, to insider glimpses into companies' day-to-day operations, a curated executive job board and thought provoking original content. As a technology enabled recruitment firm, Ivy Exec offers companies flexible, customized search solutions and helps companies tap top talent by mining its proprietary member database. Ivy Exec clients also have unique opportunities to publicize their employment brands to a highly engaged audience, solidifying their market reputations as premier employers.