



MANAGING PEOPLE

MANAGING YOUR MANAGER

In the latest in F&M's series on 'How to get better at...' to help members hone key work skills, **Jennifer MacKay** explains how to get the most out of those who manage you.

You will probably have several managers – good and bad – over your working lifetime. They can be your best advocate or worst nightmare. So there is a strong argument for investing in your own ability to work effectively with yours.

Why do we need to get better at managing our own manager?

You may well think that the managing is supposed to go in the other direction. Yes, of course, part of your manager's remit is to develop you. Ultimately, though, we are responsible for our own career trajectory. And those who commit to proactively managing their manager(s) will find career progression easier and their work more satisfying.

What does it mean?

Managing your manager is about fostering a positive, mutually beneficial working relationship, based on 'customised communication'.

If your reaction to such an idea is "but we just don't understand each other," ...well done; you have spotted the nub of the problem. While you and your manager may both want similar outcomes, the way you talk about getting there may differ. Styles can collide – eg they like structured

meetings while you're more impromptu; or they are 'big picture' whereas you love detail. The list goes on. And if it goes unchecked, it is disruptive.

It is easy to criticise our managers, but some of their difficult traits do have a positive flip side: the key is making these work for us.

Your task is therefore to identify your manager's style. Once you know this, you can adapt or 'customise' your style to meet theirs. With practice this will make life better for you both. It can also help team performance and productivity.

Five managerial styles

Let's begin by identifying five common styles – and how to handle them. First absorb these management styles and the suggested actions. Then look at the box 'Getting better at managing your manager', which is a useful guide to putting this advice into practice.

1. Mr/Ms Micromanager

Can delegate, but has trouble letting go. Craves updates and may repeatedly ask you the same questions. Makes unnecessary suggestions about how to do the task. Once it is completed, 'kindly' redoes it

for you without your permission. They are 'helping' because they feel they know best and have a better way of doing things. Plus, they are nervous that you are going to mess up and make them look bad!

Tips for managing Mr/Ms Micromanager

Big rule: clarify expectations. To do this:

- agree task specifics at the outset – how it will be done, deadlines etc;
- establish credibility. Appreciate their interest, but firmly reassure them of your expertise. If you need help, let them know upfront what you need;
- agree interim report dates; and
- complete early – building trust and minimising Micromanager's need to interfere.

2. Mr/Ms Out of their Depth

Has been promoted beyond their competence level. Their lack of ability



Jennifer MacKay is a communication trainer and consultant. UK-based, her work has also taken her to Europe and the Middle East.

jennifer@jumpraining.co.uk

undermines their authority. They may have good intentions, but their promises don't materialise into action. Their management is inconsistent and their intention unclear. They work long hours just to stay afloat and get stressed easily.

Tips for managing Mr/Ms Out of their Depth

Big rule: minimise their workload. To achieve this:

- be solution- rather than problem focused;
- be specific about how you can help them. Offer to attend meetings or take on self-contained pieces of their work;
- outline what you need from them to help your career; and
- widen your network, since this may never be a successful team and outside contacts may help if you decide to move on.

3. Mr/Ms Me

May look like a team player, but it is a team of one. The Me Manager knows how you can contribute to their success, but is less clear about advancing yours. After all isn't working for Mr/Ms Me everything you could ever want, they mentally argue? Good at taking all the credit and sharing out the blame, they can talk anyone round. So it is no surprise that this networking aficionado knows everyone and everything. Lunch, anyone?

Tips for managing Mr/Ms Me Manager

Big rule: show you are in the know. To do this:

- keep them in the picture;
- make them look good by doing a good job;
- praise them publicly;
- tell them what you are good at and how this can help them; and
- leverage off them – by asking for advice, shadowing, attending meetings and events with them and getting introduced to their contacts.

4. Mr/Ms Timebomb

Is angry a lot of the time. There's never a convenient time to ask for clarification and nothing you do is ever good enough. Often fails to keep you in the loop. Instead they expect you to be a clairvoyant and guess what they're thinking. Happy to sabotage your efforts, they are critical of you in front of others.

GETTING BETTER AT MANAGING YOUR MANAGER

To help you develop your own skills, here's your step-by-step guide to managing your manager.

Step 1: Identify your manager's and your own preferred style

- Motivators: recognition, money, efficiency, etc.
- Stress triggers: time, lack of resources, etc.
- Favoured methods of communication: email, face-to-face, telephone, planned meetings, impromptu meetings.
- Operating style: big picture or lots of detail; wants loads of updates or leaves you to it; direct and concise or conversational and chatty.

Step 2: Compare

Compare styles. Which traits do you share and where do you differ? Think of examples.

Step 3: Select a situation that needs help

- Outline the situation.
- Define your approach to the situation.
- Now do the same for your manager.

Step 4: Customise your strategy

Now it's time to plan. Ask:

- What does my manager need from me in order for this to be successful?
- What do I need from my manager?
- How do I manage the process to suit their style?
- How do I present information/tasks to make them most accessible for my manager?

Step 5: Keep a journal

Keep a journal of what works and what doesn't. Build on what you've learnt.

Tips for managing Mr/Ms Timebomb

Big rule: keep calm and confident. So:

- ensure your behaviour is impeccably professional at all times;
- be confident and precise;
- put things in writing – this gives you both a written record of what has been agreed;
- build up your network outside the team, for more balanced feedback; and
- consider keeping a journal in case things turn nasty.

5. Mr/Ms Remote

Is always at meetings or working on more important projects. Physically this high flyer isn't around much and when they are they aren't that accessible. You don't you get much time to ask for direction or encouragement. Mr/Ms Remote is a big picture person with little patience for details. They just expect you to get on with it.

Tips for managing Mr/Ms Remote

Big rule: respect their time and be prepared. To that end:

- book time in their diary to meet;
- send a concise email of your points that they can read before the meeting;

- set your own objectives and keep the manager updated briefly; and
- progress projects without their direct involvement.

When all else fails...

Regrettably there are some people who may be simply too difficult. If attempts to develop a mutually positive working relationship with your manager consistently fail, your best career decision may be to find another job.

Conclusion

Managing your manager may not have formed part of your original job description, but don't let that be a reason to ignore it. After all, managing your manager is really about managing your career. And who would willingly neglect to do that?

Jennifer MacKay will be speaking on 'Managing your manager' at the faculty's Women in Finance event on 8 March 2011. For more information visit icaew.com/index.cfm/route/175622