

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Working Together: Strategies to Improve Your Employee-Supervisor Relationship

Your relationship with your manager, supervisor or leader can have a major impact on your job performance and job satisfaction. Good managers not only inspire, but can also give you the tools and direction you need to achieve your best. They provide the mentorship, acknowledgement and constructive feedback necessary to build a rewarding and successful long-term career.

However, some people may struggle to maintain a positive relationship with their supervisor. Even with the best intentions, differences in personality, values and work style can create tension. You may become frustrated if you feel your manager:

- Gives harsh or excessive criticism
- Doesn't properly acknowledge or reward achievements
- Poorly communicates expectations
- Offers inadequate training or guidance
- Is not accessible
- Has too much involvement in day-to-day tasks (i.e., is a micromanager)
- Doesn't offer enough constructive feedback
- Makes unfair or unreasonable decisions

Of course this list barely scratches the surface when it comes to potential points of disagreement. Unfortunately, it's often unrealistic to expect managers to dramatically change their personality or management style, especially in the short-term. But when a manager-employee relationship isn't working, there are many strategies you can use to minimize or eliminate areas of tension and work more effectively with your supervisor:

Look within. Ask yourself what you can do to improve the relationship and excel at your own job. Since you can only control your own actions, focus on consistently meeting deadlines, exceeding expectations and having a positive attitude. Even if your efforts aren't always acknowledged, you'll quickly earn the trust that is the foundation of any good manager-employee relationship.

Just ask. If your manager hasn't provided enough feedback or clarification, it may simply be that he or she isn't aware you need it. Sometimes the easiest way to get what you need to do your job effectively, resolve any doubts and clear the air is to speak up before issues arise and clarify details.

Manage expectations. Before beginning any major project, spend some time with your manager to clarify objectives, deadlines and other expectations. If you don't think you'll be able to achieve the goal within the timeline, or need extra support to do so, discuss it with your boss well in advance. Keeping yourself and your manager on the same page can help avoid unnecessary conflict and unwelcome "surprises."

Adapt to your supervisor's preferences. Every boss has their own management style and communication preferences. Some like to have hands-on involvement in all aspects of a project, while others may expect you to take the initiative and run with it. Similarly, managers may want you to check in often or by particular methods (e.g., voicemail, face-to-face or by phone). You'll likely have a more positive working relationship if you can align with your manager's working style.

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Step into your manager's shoes. Take time to understand the challenges your boss faces and how these may affect his or her behavior towards you. Your manager, for example, may not be returning your calls because of a busy schedule, or may be on edge due to increased pressure from clients and his or her own boss. Recognizing the reasons behind behavior straining your relationship can give you the empathy to better handle tense moments, ensure you don't take your boss's stress personally and help you deal with challenges more effectively.

Avoid heated confrontations. While sometimes difficult, do your best to avoid responding with emotion when addressing harsh criticism or controversial decisions. Instead, calmly and rationally outline any objections with supporting evidence. Treat all criticism as a learning experience and focus the conversation on how you can improve your work for future assignments.

Get to know your manager as a person. Like anyone, your manager is a complex person defined by their experience, hopes and interests. While you may never become friends, getting to know your manager on a more personal level can help you better understand and appreciate your boss's motivations and actions.

Encourage good management practices. If your manager does something you appreciate, acknowledge it. Highlighting your supervisor's good management practices reinforces this kind of behavior and makes your boss more likely to continue with these positive actions.

Consider other options. Sometimes things just aren't meant to be. If your relationship with your manager appears irreconcilable, consider making a change for the better.

Developing an effective working relationship with your manager isn't always easy. It usually takes a willingness to adapt, as well as a concerted effort to build trust and find common ground. The effort is well worth it though, as a healthier employee-supervisor relationship can make your work days more productive, rewarding and enjoyable.