

Improving Your Relationship with the Boss

“Career experts say your relationship with your boss can impact your career and your emotional well-being—on and off the job. It’s true.”

While a good relationship with your boss can improve your workplace efficiency and career growth, a poor relationship may impair your long-term ability to succeed. Fortunately, there are some strategies that you can adopt to ensure positive and productive relationships with those who direct your work.

Why Problems Occur

When you are not communicating well with your supervisor, you may grow increasingly uncomfortable with the relationship. This syndrome is the beginning of most long-term relationship problems. Personalities sometimes clash, but far more often, early struggles with communication between parties lay the groundwork for what can feel like irreconcilable differences.

Common Problems between Supervisors and Supervisees

Although every person is unique, few problems encountered at work are truly unique. Communication difficulties often top the list of problems employees have with their bosses. Other common problems that appear in relationships with supervisors include:

- Disparities in the amount of work assigned to employees
- Minimal praise or no recognition for a job well done
- Dissatisfaction with pay and refusal to address it
- Personality style and performance style differences
- Minimal or no constructive feedback about performance

The Relationship Fix-up Meeting

- Prior to meeting with your boss, define the real issue that is creating problems in your relationship. Consider whether you played a role. Did communication issues play a role?
- Write down your concerns. Forget the small and petty stuff for now.
- Meet with your supervisor and explain in plain, unemotional language your observations and concerns about the relationship.
- Be positive in your energy and demeanor—not cocky, passive aggressive, or acting as if you are cornering your boss.
- Wait for your supervisor’s response. He or she may agree or may have another opinion. Hang on every word. Do not be defensive.
- Own your “half” of the relationship problem. It is unlikely you will get very far if you don’t accept the universal principle that each party in conflict plays a role in contributing to relationship problems.
- Your goal is an improved relationship, not to find fault.
- Ask for constructive feedback on your performance. Let your boss have the last word in this conversation.
- Initiate regular contact with your boss going forward.



Analyzing Your Conflicts ...

To decide what problems may exist in your relationship, ask: “What does my boss expect from me?” and “What are my boss’s objectives compared to my own?” Then find out what steps you need to take to achieve a strong and productive relationship.

Dos and Don’ts

When you experience trouble communicating, **DO**:

- Improve channels of communication and increase frequency of communication
- Speak with your boss freely about your concerns
- Ask for advice about problems you experience
- Write down your concerns and share them
- Consider your boss’s perspective
- Use tact when discussing your differences

When having trouble working with your boss, **DON’T**:

- Jump to conclusions
- Suspect your boss of plotting against you
- Make unfounded accusations based on supposition rather than facts
- Speak while angry
- Remain in denial and avoid your boss
- Criticize your boss in front of others

What the EAP Can Do

The EAP can offer you confidential support and help you evaluate your relationship with the boss. The EAP can help you discover the barriers to better communication so you can get past them. The EAP can also listen objectively, give you feedback to help you make better judgments about your role, and validate your ideas and impressions. You may be right in many of your perceptions. With this awareness, however, you will be able to take the best steps forward to improve your workplace relationships.

This information is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or healthcare provider. Please consult your health care provider or EAP for advice about a personal concern or medical condition.