Managing Up, Down and Across
Trevis Baker 2015

Managing Up

One of the first management skills we learn is “managing up”. We all start out with a Supervisor, and those of us who survive get good at keeping that person “happy”. Early in my career I had a lion of a manager who once roared some wise advice in my direction: “When your manager needs something, it moves straight to the top of your priority list!” The lesson I learned is that what interests my Supervisor ought to fascinate me. It’s the only way to tame that lion.... At least that was my early belief...

Many people focus on managing up because they believe it is a short cut to faster career advancement. A good senior manager can usually recognize people who can only “manage up, not down” and view the inability to do a good job of managing down with the team as a deficiency.

Here are a few tips on managing up:

- Keep your supervisor informed of all the key things he/she needs to know. A good rule of thumb is if the client called - how much information would he expect your boss to have, without feeling that he was micromanaging.
- Be proactive. Bring your boss ideas, thoughts, suggestions, etc. for your account, the agency or any other responsibilities he/she may have. If the boss likes an idea, offer to spearhead it.
- Talk about your Manager positively to other people. Don’t make stuff up, but do stress positive things about him/her or what it’s like to work for him/her.
- When you bring problem(s), always have a recommended solution(s). It may not be the perfect answer, but it takes the onus off him/her to solve it and gives him/her a starting point to build on.

Managing Down

Eventually, you become a Manager yourself. Managing staff (“managing down”) is a career milestone. Young employees look forward to the time when they can make the decisions and others will hop to satisfy them. Soon however they discover its actually hard work to keep staff members motivated and productive. The dirty secret of management is that the power bestowed by your title is actually quite limited. The people who work for you can be considered volunteers. They choose how hard to work and they can choose to ignore you, or leave, at any time if they’re not satisfied with your leadership.

Being a good team leader is an important skill that we tend not to pay enough attention to. In addition to it being important for leadership, it often has a big impact on morale and productivity.

Here are some fundamental pointers:

- Communicate. Communicate. Communicate. The single biggest complaint people have about their Leadership Team is that they don’t tell them what’s going on. This makes them feel insignificant and unimportant.
- Be firm and straightforward, but fair. It’s important to be direct with people to minimize miscommunication. Ambiguity to spare someone’s feelings may be an easy path to take, it’s however the wrong one. Constructive criticism is a good thing.
- Make the time to ask people what they think and then really think about what they’ve said. It’s great training for junior people and you’ll be delighted to get solutions you might not have thought of or considered.
- As you do with your Manager, ask your people to come to you with recommended solutions to
problems. Again, it’s great training and part of the way to make them smarter/better account people.

- **Be available and accessible** - Let your people know that you have an open-door policy and follow through on it. If they don’t come to you periodically, you should initiate a dialogue with them.
- **Do not micromanage** - Give your people responsibility and autonomy. Let them know that you’re there as a “safety net” if they need you.

As you know, getting the “people” part of any business and especially in management has a disproportionately high failure rate. Being great at your job is not only about the function and content of the job, but also very much about the how you get things done, how you communicate with people and how you work with people. To reduce our failure rates, concentrate on engaging staff not being the "Boss"

In our business, it’s incredibly rare to see a successful manager who is not also a successful manager of people and understand the needs of their staff and place the overall success of the Staff over their own "immortality"

**Managing Across**

Managing across the organization, tests your ability to build trust and to influence others since you wield little or no organizational power with your colleagues. Everyone had a taste of managing across while working in groups but this skill becomes essential when you’re part of a permanent management team. The success of an organization depends on how well the management team works together. The level of collaboration must be high and core for you to be effective.

If even one of the Teams key members acts with self-interest rather than concern for the organization, the management team can easily become dysfunctional as it tilts from cooperation to competition between members. A high-performance management team is a daring trapeze act with members taking risks for the sake of the organization, secure in the knowledge that their colleagues will be there to catch them if and when needed.

To be a good manager you need to be able to rotate easily between managing up, down and across depending on the situation. It’s quite a juggling act, however the top performers become the stars of the show in the centre ring of their organization’s ability to perform effectively. Learn to Manage High, Wide and Deep.

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