

Stress Factor #2: Communication with Management

There's a big difference between working *for* someone and working *with* someone. The majority of all problems with the boss revolve around the inability by the boss to communicate what needs to be done, what's a priority, and what duties/tasks are required.

Part of your job when assisting someone is to do just that – ASSIST THEM! Remember: your boss is not you! He/she does not possess your exceptional organizational or multi-tasking skills. Thus, he/she relies on you to keep things in order and moving forward. Overseeing a staff of employees is only one element of the job your boss has. He/she is also answering to other people, managing the budget, troubleshooting bigger issues, and working to ensure that you get a paycheck every week!

The next time an apparent miscommunication has taken place, try to figure out what could have prevented the problem. Here are some examples:

- **Your boss gives you something you feel is not really your job.** If you find yourself performing tasks that you don't think are within the scope of your responsibilities, ask your boss to clarify your duties. The business world changes very fast, and he/she may not have had the time to "formally" notify you that a new task may now be part of your workload.

- **Your boss asks you to handle a personal errand.** If you feel a personal errand is inappropriate, simply tell him/her that you aren't able to handle that request because you're working to meet a deadline. If your boss changes the deadline, then politely say that you're not comfortable with this type of request.
- **You have not received promised raises or promotions.** Your job was represented to you as something that offered higher pay and promotions for loyalty and longevity. Yet, none of this is happening. Set up a meeting with your boss and present your case in a business-like manner. Explain what you've accomplished, show how you've saved the company money, and mention your ability to handle the tasks associated with a change in position. If hard economic times have affected the company and no one is getting the raises/promotions they were promised, be understanding. Since this is probably not your boss's fault, indicating you agree that it's probably the wrong time won't negatively affect your relationship with the boss.
- **You and the boss just really don't "care" for each other.** If moving to another position or job isn't an option (which it isn't in many cases), then try to find something about your boss that is a positive trait and acknowledge that trait. For example, if he/she has terrific time management skills, why not ask for a few pointers the next time your schedule is pretty tight. Or, if he/she provides hand-written meeting notes that are easy to read and well organized, mention that by having the notes in this format saves you a tremendous amount of time (and eyestrain). You don't need to become a "brown noser." Instead, simply look for the good aspects of a perceived bad situation.

- **Your boss always negatively criticizes your work.**
Again, your boss is probably too busy to even realize that the only words coming out of his/her mouth are negative. Therefore, the next time you're getting feedback, specifically ask about something that you know he/she probably liked. For example, if you did a report with 4 sections, and he/she made some comments about section 3 only, why not say, "So sections 1, 2, and 4 are what you were looking for?" The response can only be "yes" or "no" and, since the boss hadn't flagged those sections as inadequate, a "yes" is probably forthcoming!
- **You had a great idea that your boss just seems to ignore.** Most bosses are frustrated by the fact that they can't get as much done as they'd like to. So, when new ideas come along, it can be rather upsetting if you know that there's no way the idea can be carried to fruition. Ask yourself the following:
 - Did you present the idea in such a way that the benefit was immediately recognizable?
 - Did you outline all the pros/cons (including costs)?
 - Did you clearly explain the problem and the possible solutions?

Most employees (since they're not managers) do not have a clear understanding of "cost vs. benefit analysis." Because of this, most "ideas" are not presented in a format that the boss can easily take to upper management. If you're serious about getting your ideas heard, find someone (maybe even your boss) who can give you the details about this approach.

In general, communication is always 50% the responsibility of each party. Therefore, take your 50% seriously and do your part to keep the lines of communication open.