



# Enterprising Rural Families<sup>TM</sup>

This newsletter is an instrument of the *Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work* program of the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service. For further information concerning the Enterprising Rural Families program or on-line course contact [information@eRuralFamilies.org](mailto:information@eRuralFamilies.org) or go to <http://eRuralFamilies.org/>.

## TIP OF THE MONTH:

### DEALING WITH EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

- Create an atmosphere that promotes health—emphasize balance, provide recreation or stress relief activities.
- Create job diversity for those with repetitive tasks. It also provides cross training.
- Keep employees involved— increase the control they have over their work environment and the work itself, even if they are only small choices.
- Allow employees to chat and interact.
- Make sure you are not trying to do too much with too little. Employees should not have to give 110% every day. Provide adequate staffing, personal leave and vacation benefits.
- Recognize and reward employees for accomplishments and contributions.

An Online Newsletter January, 2009 Volume V, Issue 1

## MANAGING YOUR BOSS

By: Bill Taylor, Northeast Wyoming Community Development Extension Educator



The relationship with your boss is probably the most important relationship you have at work. Boss management can stimulate better performance, improve your working life, job satisfaction, and workload.

When we think of managing someone, we usually think of managing our team members or subordinates. However, we should also understand some principles that will enhance our working relationship with our boss.

**1. Decisions:** If you do not want a “no” or procrastination, give him/her a hand.

Your boss has other subordinates, other decisions to make. Thus, if pressed for a decision, it is easiest to say “no.”

To avoid the “no” that will ruin yours’ and your team’s enthusiasm, give your boss a hand.

- Remind them of where you left it last time you met;
- Remind them of the objective rather than rushing to the 'what' and 'how';
- Remind them of past problems encountered because a decision was not made;
- Quickly summarize the options considered, your criteria for selecting one option -- the one you are presenting;
- Tell them what you expect from them: simply to inform, to decide jointly, to share the risk, to add one criterion, to re-examine the option;
- Focus on the points where you need their help;
- Be prepared with facts and data for potential disagreements. Help them out with graphics and visuals so that the situation is grasped faster;
- After your meeting, summarize for them the decision in writing to make sure of the understanding;
- And finally, once a decision has been made, your way, their way or no way, do not criticize it externally. You have become the best defender; the best ambassador of what was decided.

**2. Manage their time:** You may represent only 1% of their problems, don't make it as if it is 100%.



Yes, you have preoccupations, problems to solve and issues to tackle. However, while your time is entirely devoted to them, do not expect your boss's time to be also.

- The more simple the problem or issue at hand is, the less time you should have them spend on it: prepare, summarize, and synthesize information and options. Do not confuse your more frequent problems with the most important ones.
- Book him or her for several meetings in advance. Nothing is more frustrating than to have to wait days, weeks or months for that extra new meeting needed in order to finalize a decision or a project.

**3. An opinion:** If you ask for their opinion, they will always have one. And their opinion may not always be that of a genius or a visionary. However, once given, the opinion becomes a constraint: was it an order? So, if you don't want your boss's opinion then don't ask for it.



- Choose the right moment to avoid procrastination: not only save their time by focusing on big issues, but choose the right moment to do so. If you present an issue at the wrong moment, the chances are she or he will procrastinate.
- Prepare for your meeting: first because the advantage is to the one who is prepared, second because the preparation helps you reduce the time taken to come to the central issue.
- Show the forest before the trees in a discussion: if you want to avoid spending a lot of time on going back to basics before she or he is at full speed with you, start with the basics yourself. Remind them of the objective, where you stand today, and what you want their opinion on.

**4. Information:** It is not data.

Perhaps you are supposed to analyze the results of a market survey. So be selective; be visual; group the data; bring out what is essential. Data overload creates stress, which in turn can create denial, rejection, and numbness. As a manager, you are paid to collect the data, and turn it into useful information.

- Don't give them only the bad news: also give good news. If you keep bringing only bad news, little by little you become the bad news yourself. Don't minimize good news because you want to focus on the problems. By doing that, you contribute to creating a bad atmosphere.
- Make sure they do not get the information from others too often: sometimes by being shy about what we should give or because we think it is not relevant, we don't feed our boss with key elements. However, other people could do it before you. And then the hassle starts. "I heard...", "Why didn't you tell me..." And then you need to justify yourself; you may need to modify incorrect information. The trade off is between too little information leading to starvation, frustration, and/or restlessness vs. too much information leading to overload.
- Round off: what helps more to give sense to an amount or a size: 886,262.11 or 890K?
- Participate in and contribute to their informal network: every manager, hopefully, does not rely solely on formal information given in internal documents and reports. Some people use internal informal networks. Some others also have an informal outside network of experts, friends, and business connections that help them shape their vision of the world and how to act. You have yours; your boss has too. Why not volunteer part of yours', so that you do not always have to react and be defensive about information fed by people you do not necessarily think are the best sources?

**5. Problems:** Don't just come with problems, come also with solutions.

Good bosses hate two kinds of behavior. The courtesan who always comes to tell you how great you are and the pyromaniac or fireman who comes to tell you "There is a huge problem" and then says "but don't worry, I will solve it!"

There is also a third kind, the monkey transferor. She or he has a problem and puts it on your shoulders, rather than bringing a solution or at least some options.

On which of those steps in problem solving do you want your boss's input? Just be clear on what input you want rather than come with the stressful -- "I have a problem..." and throw the monkey.

**6. Assumptions:** Do not assume your boss knows as much as you do, but assume they can understand; so educate them. You are the expert. You spend all of your time and that of your team on the issue. You live with data, pressure points and levers; your boss doesn't. They do not know more than you do.

If you need their perspective, it is because it is broader; they have a better sense for inter-relationships with other parts of the organization. You have two options.

- You inundate them with technical stuff they do not understand, hoping that the amount of technical jargon will knock them down and force them to agree with you. It may work, but it may become a barrier in communication leading to lack of trust.
- You educate them by simplifying, using easy to understand language, feeding them with articles, examples, best practices, summaries that help them see a perspective. By creating understanding, you relieve tensions; create trust that can lead to better decision-making.



**7. Delegations:** Constantly test the waters.

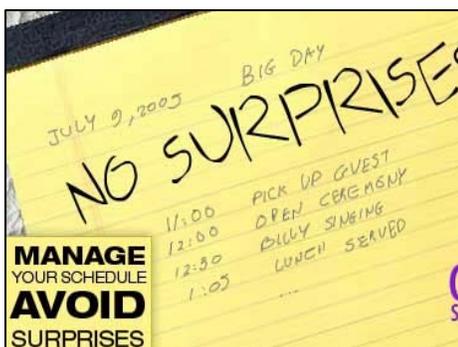
It's not always easy to define what is delegated to a person. Some companies prefer to use the principle of subsidiary rather than the principle of delegation: the principle of subsidiary stipulates that you can do everything except the following list, whereas in the principle of delegation you stipulate, "you cannot do anything except..."

Whichever is used, there will always be some doubt whether you have or do not have the delegation. You have two options: either you play it safe by always asking your boss's opinion; or you assume too much, make decisions and learn after the fact that it was not yours to decide. In between, there is the *'test the waters'* strategy especially for things or areas, domains or steps that are unprecedented.

**8. Promises:** Do not promise what you cannot deliver, and avoid surprises, trust is at stake.

Trust does not develop overnight and depends a lot on the predictability of the other person: what they say and do, how often they are living up to or not living up to their statements. In the same way, you will not fully trust your boss if he or she changes their mind too often or says things contrary to what you were told the last time.

You also want to avoid being seen as unreliable by not delivering on what you promise or surprising them with bad news without forewarning.



Do not promise dates for finishing projects you cannot handle. If you see that too much is asked of you, sit down and re-discuss priorities before proceeding, rather than becoming a bottleneck yourself. Involve your boss in the process, so it becomes a common priority.

Avoid bad surprises. If your job is to be in charge of a particular area, then it is also to be in charge of bad results and improving them.

Involve your boss in discussing and evaluating the risks, agreeing on key lead indicators that you will both share, so that neither you nor he or she will be surprised.

## 9. Differences: Manage differences in culture.

To simplify, four main types of profiles are:

- People who like to 'control things' and introduce processes, develop more the 'now';
- People who are more concerned with people, develop more the impact on people;
- People who are more concerned with getting things done, start with key actions;
- People who are more concerned with ideas, frame proposals in concepts.

Of course, in managing your boss you should know their personal inclination, as well as your personal bias. If you are process oriented, you will tend to present issues in a systematic and orderly fashion, with pros and cons, chronology of tasks, etc.

If your boss is the action type, they could be bored with that approach. So an executive summary, emphasizing the key actions and results would be a handy starting point.

## 10. Trust: Don't be sloppy in your documentation. It undermines trust.

By making the assumption that our boss will check what we write or say anyway, and that they will make changes, we sometimes tend to be sloppy in our writing. Tables are not finished, text is not re-read, places we are going to are not visited beforehand, spelling is not checked, and information is missing...

By not finalizing your facts, arguments, memos, spelling, supporting documents, etc., you can be sure some things will get changed, mistakes corrected. And soon you will be asked to show more facts and figures, and you will see more changes, more amendments. Soon all the delegation you had will be gone.

So remember, there are correct and incorrect ways to manage your boss. Learn how to help them, help you!

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Taken from an article by Jacques Horovitz in the *BoardSource* newsletter.

***An Important, but mostly disregarded, aspect of a job is your relationship with your boss, as she/he can determine your success/failure as a worker/team member. Effective workers take time and effort to manage not only their relationships with their subordinates, but also those with their bosses. Managing your boss is as important as managing your time.***



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***January, 2009 Volume V, Issue 1***