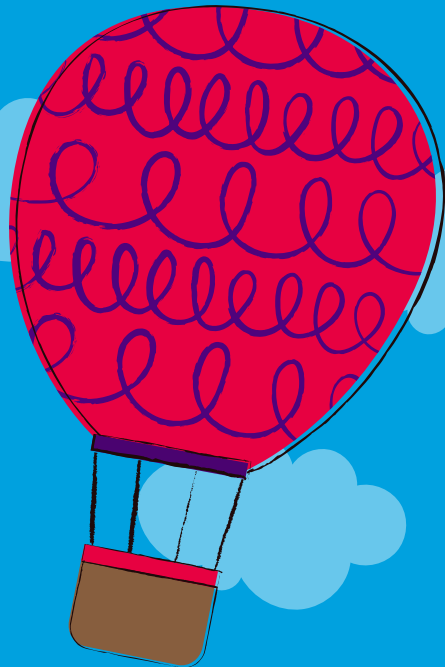


Zoomly®

Keep Up

Managing Upwards

A Zoomly guide



What IS 'managing upwards' – and why should you bother?

For most of the time at work, 'managing upwards' refers to working with your immediate manager (or managers).

Somewhere in the organisation, there's a chart with a reporting line that links you both. In plain English, you work for them. This person will have some responsibility for what you do in your daily work, as well as supporting your ongoing performance and development. They will have input on your appraisals, discuss your goals and objectives with you and track your progress.

Your relationship with your immediate boss can have a significant impact on your career – for good or otherwise. They can show you the ropes, give you invaluable advice and recommend you for promotion or a high-profile project. Alternatively, they may micro-manage, make unreasonable demands, and belittle you in front of your colleagues.

No surprise that surveys often find the #1 reason given for seeking another job is 'my boss', 'how I'm managed' or 'lack of opportunity'.

Even if your current manager is less than perfect, it's worth investing time and effort in managing upwards. Developing this relationship will build essential skills in emotional intelligence, communication and managing stakeholders. What's more, you'll gain priceless insights for your own development as someone who manages others. Over time, you'll also benefit from building working relationships across a broader range of people who are 'upwards' in the organisation.

It's no surprise that 'How to manage upwards' is a popular choice from Zoomly's menu of bite-sized topics; the quality of your upward working relationships affects how you feel about your job, your employer – and yourself. It also doesn't surprise me that this topic prompts more of those 'can I just ask you something?' questions at the end of the workshop. To all of you who ask those questions, I want to say 'Thank You' – for your honesty and your inspiration. This download aims to help you and those in similar situations.



Where do you stand with your manager?

How many of the statements that follow are true for your current situation with your immediate manager? You might want to take notes:

1. My manager and I have discussed and agreed clear goals and objectives for me to achieve and we've identified the actions I need to take to ensure progress.
2. I have regular 1:1 conversations or check-ins with my boss, about both the work I'm doing – and how I'm doing it.
3. My manager actively supports the training and development I need to do my job well.
4. I get clear, actionable feedback from my boss about my performance at work.
5. My manager asks me for feedback on their performance.
6. My manager trusts me to do my job well.

Now reflect on these questions:

- What are you pleased about?
- What's working well?
- What, if anything, do you want to change?



Quiz: how well do you know your boss?

Use this quick quiz to reflect on how well you know your manager – what they're like and what matters to them. Got more than one boss? Start with the manager you work with most frequently. You can come back and consider other managers to whom you have a reporting line.

Score each of the six points below 1-10, where 1 = 'I don't know at all' and 10 = 'I know this 100%'

How well do you know...

1. The objectives (Key Results, Targets, KPIs – whatever they're called where you work) against which your manager's performance is evaluated?
2. What 2-3 tasks or activities take up most of their time at work?
3. Who they admire – and why?
4. What they're known for being great at?
5. What they're not so great at – and what impact that has?
6. What they respond well or badly to within the team?

How did you do?

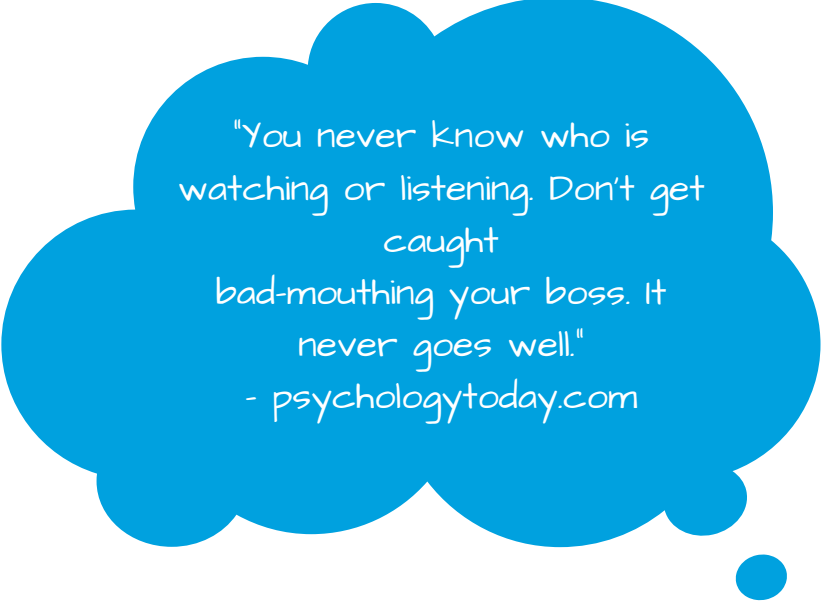
Note your scores against each point, then add up your total score.

Score 46-60: well done, you probably have a productive working relationship with your manager. You may already be doing many of the tips that follow but were unaware of this – until now. How does that work for you? Who can benefit from your knowledge?

Score 31-45: Give yourself a pat on the back for the items you scored more highly than others. Notice how these aspects of your working relationship with your manager benefit you both. Consider the other items, where you scored lower – how can you address these? This will help you focus on the actions that will enhance how you manage upwards.

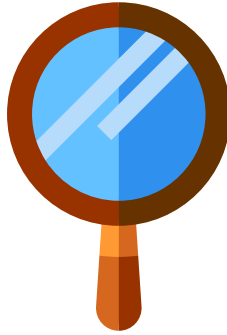
Score 16-30: Your score may reflect a distant working relationship with your manager; they may be in a different country, time zone or building. Another possible reason for your score is that you're in a large team and your manager's time and attention is thinly spread. Take a look at the 6 items again: which of them could you focus on first? When it comes to your working relationship, what's the smallest thing that will make the biggest difference?

Score 1-15: Your score may be because you're new to your role, or your manager is to theirs. If so, you can begin to work more effectively together by reflecting on what follows and how you can apply it to your situation. Alternatively, if you've been working together for a while, you will benefit from considering how you can apply what follows to learn more about your manager, their job and how they do it. From there you can identify ways to improve the situation and work more effectively with them.



"You never know who is watching or listening. Don't get caught bad-mouthing your boss. It never goes well."
- psychologytoday.com

How does your manager see you?



Time to look in the mirror. What does your manager see when they work with you? What's it like for them? How do they perceive you? As someone who's reliable and conscientious? Or as someone who often delivers work that's late and/or will need to be checked, revised and checked again? Do they see a valued and trusted team member? Or someone who's a drag on the team's performance?

Take a few moments to close your eyes (if it's safe to do so) and 'see' yourself through your manager's eyes. Look at how you work together from their point of view, in their own words. Pick a specific recent situation if it helps. Replay how they speak to you, what they say, how they say it and their facial expressions.

Now reflect on these questions:

- What does your boss expect from you? Do you deliver that?
- What do they think you're great at? How do you know they think that?
- What does your boss want you to improve or do differently?
- What insights do you now have?
- What do you need to find out, to fill in some knowledge gaps?
- What, if anything, do you want to do more or less of?

"The secret to a healthy boss-subordinate relationship is to remember that it's just that, a relationship. You're two messy human beings doing the best you can."

- Karin Hurt, author of *Overcoming an Imperfect Boss*

What makes your boss tick?



No two managers operate in the exact same way, so it's worth paying attention to what makes your boss tick and how they work. Not knowing 'how things get done around here' has tripped up many an ambitious employee, and it starts with your immediate manager. You'll need to adapt to them (and accept that not every manager adapts to their direct reports).

1. Are they a 'big picture' person? If so, ditch the preamble – they'll lose patience. Give them the top line and two or three punchy points to back it up. Be ready for questions about next steps, not just the immediate future, but beyond.

2. Do they make decisions based on logic? Then they'll need to see sound thinking: the logical, sequential steps to take. They'll want to hear about costs and benefits.

3. What's their approach to deadlines? Order and organised? Or random and chaotic? If the latter, build in more time to plan and keep people informed of last-minute changes.

4. What's their preferred medium for communicating? Always email? Face to face? Via chat? Or a text? Find out – ask if you really can't figure it out – and adapt to their preferences whenever practicable.

5. Are they keen on process and procedure? Whatever you do, don't miss a step out. Create a checklist (if there isn't one already) and review it with them, as you 'want to make sure you're following the right process' and get their input. Ask how often they want it updated and circulated.

6. Are you dealing with a people person? They will most likely want to check plans and decisions for fairness and their impact on people.

7. Do they like to be in control? Then rather than going to them with your one-and-only, perfect-fit solution, come up with at least two options from which they can choose.

Where could you be going wrong?

It happens: you think you're doing a great job and then – out of the blue – your manager gives you some really negative feedback. This can be bruising, which is why it's sometimes referred to as a 'feedslap'. Use these questions to check you're on the right track:

Are you failing to nail the basics?

The often-boring, sometimes-routine, usually-repetitive stuff simply needs to get done, on time and right. If you're neglecting the basics your manager will be quite right to check up on you; and if you're neglecting them to swan off and do work that seems more interesting, he or she will be quite right to be annoyed. Make sure you're completely clear on the bigger picture for all your basic tasks – where do they fit in? If in doubt, ask.

Are you working to the wrong priorities?

What you might think is important may not be; what you think isn't urgent just might be. If you're floundering and not sure what to do next, ask for some time to sit down with your boss and agree which tasks are top priority, and what the delivery dates are. Prepare your version of priority tasks for discussion. Then, even if your idea of priorities gets changed at least you'll be able to demonstrate you're thinking about them.

Are you unclear about what's required?

Your brief update or detailed report may be going into a bigger document for publication, distribution to directors and/or shareholders, or clients. Or someone may simply need a list of useful links in order to do some quick catching up on their phone. If your manager isn't giving you this contextual information, ask for it – 'how will this be used, and by whom?' ought to get the information you need.

Are you making too few notes?

Making no notes, or poor or vague notes are a sure-fire way to annoy your manager. You didn't know you were expected to make notes? Now's a good time to start. Whether it's a 1:1 discussion with your manager or at a meeting with 20 people present, make clear notes. Recap with your manager to "just check I have this right". That's right, just like a waitress or waiter in a restaurant, you read the order back. Yes, it's simple and at first may seem a little patronising (for you if not them). But it's essential to ensure you have the same interpretation of what's required, from whom, by when.



3 ways to impress your boss

1. Find out what they value

Multiple bosses are a fact of contemporary corporate life for many. This hydra doesn't respond well to a one-size-fits-all approach. Notice what they value, and if you're not sure, just ask. Then deliver what they value. See this challenge positively: rather than having to 'pander' to different preferences, you will all benefit from learning to adapt to them. Developing this skill will stand you in good stead when dealing with colleagues now and with those you'll manage in the future.

2. Offer options and solutions

Don't just go to your manager waving a 'help me' distress flare when you're stuck. Stop and think: what are the options? What are the pros and cons of each? Which do you recommend? Then you can have a grown-up conversation with your boss, who will be more willing to help when they see you've made an effort.

3. Suggest improvements

Best done once you've got to know the systems and processes. Notice the tasks that take too long, or the processes that seem too long-winded. How can they be simplified and systematised? For example, for each task you tackle for the first time, create a checklist of the steps. Review and refine it when you've finished the job, then show your manager how it will benefit the team.

How can you learn from your manager?

Thinking of what your boss is great at, identify specific areas where you can learn from them. Here are three simple steps to take:

1. Identify something they're great at (oh come on, there must be something! Presentations? Financials? Relationship-building? Data analysis?) – that you could learn and develop.

2. Study what they do and how they do it. Yes, they 'speak well in presentations' – but how? Do they vary the volume? Or convey emotions? Sharpen your powers of observation, pay attention and take note.

3. Apply your insights at the next opportunity and ask for feedback from your manager. What worked well? What have you learned? How will you build on this next time?

"I realized then that, just because someone is in a position of authority, doesn't mean he or she knows everything. From that point forward, I stopped assuming the title 'manager was equivalent to 'all knowing.'"

- Jennifer Winter, themuse.com

Who else is 'upwards'?

When the topic of managing upwards comes up in workshops, it's typically about the immediate manager – which makes sense. However, smart people know that there's more to managing upwards than their boss. There's a whole bunch of other people who qualify as being 'upwards' that it's worth building relationships with. Caution: please don't take this as a prompt to try and book a breakfast meeting with your worldwide CEO; tread carefully and take small steps.

For example, your everyday work probably brings you into frequent contact with people in other departments and disciplines. First, you need to build and maintain relationships with those around your own level - remember, these people can make a significant impact on your team's effectiveness. What's more, they may be asked to contribute feedback on your performance, so invest effort in getting to know them. Ensure you get a clear idea of why their department exists, what it's great at and what they need from you. No big deal – these are conversations you can have in the process of getting work done – but listen well and you can be much more effective.

From there, you can build relationships with more senior people in other departments, getting beyond the usual “Hi, how’s it going?” by finding out more. You could ask how you might learn more about their specialism or ask them for advice on how to work more effectively with their team. Be sure to let them know if someone in their team is doing a great job, specifying what they’ve done to make a difference.



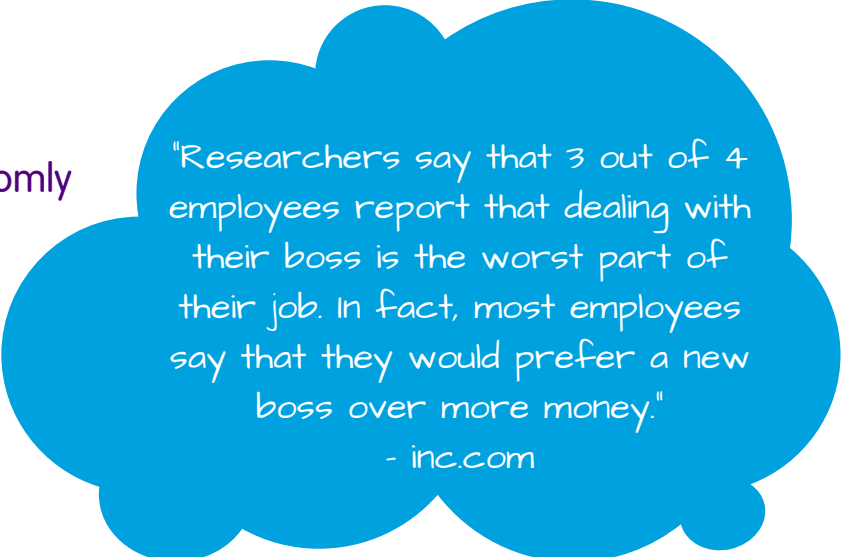
What are you waiting for?

Over the course of your career you'll pick up loads of lessons from the different people you'll report to – yes, even when you make CEO. Your manager has a huge impact on how you feel: about yourself, your job, and of course about them, when you head for home at the end of your working day. Your boss can help you get promoted – or fired. So, it's worth putting some effort into building the relationship. Now's a good time to start.

I hope you find this download useful. Any comments, feedback or questions are very welcome; drop me a note via hello@zoomly.co.uk



Dawn Sillett
Director, Zoomly



*"Researchers say that 3 out of 4 employees report that dealing with their boss is the worst part of their job. In fact, most employees say that they would prefer a new boss over more money."
- inc.com*