

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Suggested Release: week of October 26, 2015

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The Proper Care And Feeding Of Your Boss

from the American Counseling Association

If you're in a work situation where you aren't getting along with your supervisor or boss, it can be easy to forget that the person who keeps giving you a hard time is also a human being with feelings and problems you aren't seeing.

And why does that matter to you? Because studies have shown that one of the most important things affecting someone's job performance, stress levels, and overall job satisfaction and happiness is the relationship they have with the person above them.

So what can you do? The only way to improve such situations is for you to take a proactive role in creating a more positive relationship with that person above you.

Start by learning what's important to him or her as a person. Make an effort to find out if there are pet peeves, or things about your department or company that matter greatly to him or her. Does your boss have a difficult boss?

Try to understand what your supervisor expects from you. It isn't always obvious. Ask questions and seek clarification. Is it timely reports, meeting deadlines, and showing initiative? A certain dress code? Or seemingly trivial things that he or she finds important? Understanding what matters to your boss makes it easier to meet such goals, or to discuss alternatives that will still keep him or her happy.

It also helps to be flexible and understanding. While it's frustrating to have meetings rescheduled or interrupted by phone calls, there's often a reason for a supervisor to make such changes. Supervisors appreciate employees who, rather than complaining, understand that bosses face pressures, too. They're also usually more open to hearing from such employees about their own scheduling problems and work demands.

You want to keep communication open and a two-way street, rather than appearing closed off and unapproachable. Good ideas seldom follow a schedule, and emergencies never do. Make it easy for your supervisor to talk to you. And, sometimes, take the initiative. Do a quick check-in with your boss on how things are going, or to discuss an idea or concern of yours.

Make it your job to create a positive relationship with your supervisor. Each of you should feel that you understand the other and can openly talk to each other. With such a relationship, it usually means a more positive, enjoyable work environment where sharing ideas and positive accomplishments can flourish.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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words: 400