

Managing Your Manager

Introduction

This article was published in the Phnom Penh Post in 2009. At the time, we received an overwhelming response from employers, managers and young professionals in the market as to this “new concept” we were writing about. There was much disagreement that subordinates need to manage their manager as that is the primary responsibility of the manager to manage. Subordinates need to follow directions and do the jobs that manager’s request.

We are republishing the article with a few additional edits as “**Managing your Manager**” is one of the most pertinent behaviours today that employers and managers’ seek in their employees and that business needs to succeed. In a world of so much information access and new technology, a very fast paced environment, “**Managing your Manager**” is more important today, than it ever was for young people to succeed in a competitive professional environment and for companies to manage risk.



Managers need to listen closely to their employees, today more than ever. It is the power of knowledge, employee perceptions and realities of business operations that our employees know better than we do as managers. A manager’s success is that of their employees. Our ability as managers to listen to feedback and inputs we get from our teams and integrate that into strategic thinking and business strategy, is how managers ultimately can coach and lead for success. Employee feedback is how our businesses’ innovate and succeed today and how we mitigate risks in daily operations.

“Who is the manager if I must manage my manager!?”

Surprising as it sounds managing your manager whether it be your supervisor, manager, or managing director is something we do every day! We are all managing our time, projects, family priorities, personal challenges and tasks constantly. In reality, every one of us is a manager! **Managing your manager** is the first step to becoming a successful well rounded professional in the future and achieving your career goals.

Our environment today is global, fast paced, extremely dynamic. We want more as professionals, companies want more from their employees, competition keeps pushing our limits, innovation is essential to success. Everything keeps changing and we feel a lot of different pressures than perhaps we had in 2009! To maintain a successful work-life balance, there is no escaping **managing your manager**. If employees do not effectively manage upwards, set expectations and communicate in a timely manner, our work life will not only become stressful, we will suffer disappointments and stressful situations, which can easily be avoided.



Managing your manager is all about managing your *managers’ expectations*, managing and planning your work and communicating effectively to ensure that you are the most effective, efficient and creative in doing your job.

Here are some tips and tricks to help you manage your manager effectively!

Tips and Tricks for Managing Your Manager

Keep your manager up to date.

Often managers are frustrated that they have to keep following up all the time on many different things. “Did you do this, did you do that, why are you late!” We have all heard those words from our manager. In an effective work environment, your manager should never follow up on your tasks, but you should follow up with your manager as to your progress and challenges you face!

How to do this? Send your manager regular updates on what you are doing and how it is going – this could be done every week, or every two weeks depending on your work load. Discuss with your manager how he or she wants to be updated. Before the deadline of any task, you should be giving your manager the results of your projects not waiting for your manager to ask for them.

Communicate your challenges with possible solutions

Communicating a challenge does not mean you cannot do your task, it means, you are managing expectations and your work effectively. It is not a good thing if you reach a deadline and say “but I could not because” Don’t wait until the last minute to inform your manager of challenges – it’s too late!

How to do this? Tell your manager immediately if you are unable to do something and importantly, make a recommendation and give ideas of what you think you can do to overcome the challenge! Don’t say “I can’t do this ...” rather say, “I have tried all these things, but this is what has happened. I suggest we try a, b, c. I would like your inputs to continue with my task.”

Discuss your ideas with your manager and find a solution together. Always provide a solution to a challenge, don’t just bring the challenge or problem to your manager! Demonstrating your thinking and solutions shows your manager that you are creative, business minded and ready to go to the next level. Don’t be disheartened if your ideas are not used, learn from manager *why* a particular solution was chosen so that you understand *why* and can develop your thinking and knowledge.

Keep your manager informed of your competing priorities – Be realistic.

Sometimes, we have too many things to do! It does not help to say, my manager gives me too much work to do. We must discuss and keep our manager and team members informed of all the tasks we need to do – especially if you have more than one manager or reporting line.

How to do this? Try and have regular meetings with your manager and your team. Make sure that “Work Load – Who is doing what?” is on the agenda so that you are aware of all the things your team and manager are doing. Discuss when you have too many deadlines and need support. Very often, there is someone in the team who will be able to give some support! If there is no time for a meeting, try have a 5 minute discussion during the day or send an email. Remember that if you don’t communicate, then you cannot complain!



Ask for information & plan in advance

Sometimes managers assume you know something but you don’t! At HRINC we always say, “**Don’t assume. Ask and know!**” It is important that you ask questions about what you are doing and why. What are the objectives, deadlines, risks we will face, etc.? Managers are busy people and it is not an excuse to say – “But my manager is busy!” You have colleagues and other team members that can give you information and ideas. If you don’t ask, you won’t know and you will never be able to be proactive and anticipate.

Plan your work in advance, and plan on regular update meetings with your manager so that you can be effective in your job and get the required inputs from your manager you need. Regular updates doesn't mean daily updates! Depending on your projects and tasks, perhaps a weekly or monthly update is sufficient.

You can always send an email to update your manager on progress and challenges you face. Managers don't always respond to updates, but they read updates and appreciate knowing what is going on. If you have an important question that can answered on email – highlight the question in a different colour and bold it so that it stands out in the email.

Remember that too much communication can be overwhelming, be smart and thoughtful in your communication and choice of communication – speaking to people is much better than writing an email. Confirm your understanding in an email always on important matters, so that it is documented. Always remember to put a clear subject line in your emails if you are sending emails and set clear meeting objectives if you request a meeting with the necessary information your manager will need, to make decisions and be effective in the meeting.

Be proactive and anticipate

A challenge for managers is that often their team only does what they are told and nothing more. It is important that employees are proactive and anticipate challenges, different opportunities, and ideas.

How to do this? Think about what you are doing and how it will impact other processes and projects that are taking place in the office or your business unit. Remember that you cannot be proactive and anticipate, if you never asked any questions! Take an interest in other projects going on in the office. Take an interest in reading the news and keeping abreast economic changes. Take an interest in understanding what others in your team are doing. Connect the dots.

If you have identified an opportunity or a challenge that will impact your task – communicate them to your manager. Don't wait too long, especially if you feel what you have identified, could have a big impact on your work – whether or not that impact is positive or negative!

Summary

The few golden rules are **all about communication and being aware** of how your job and tasks (no matter how big or small) are an important part of the success of your company or organisation! Remember, you see things differently from where you are sitting. Your manager sees things different from where they are sitting. Combining the two perspectives are what makes and incredibly dynamic and innovative organisation that succeeds and grows.

We must all manage upwards and **manager our manager**. A CEO to a board, a manager to a CEO, staff to a manager, worker to supervisor. If you try a few of the suggestions, you will see that your work will run smoother, you may have less stress and most importantly, you will feel that the work you are doing is really contributing and having an impact on how your company is growing. And the most important thing you feel, is a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day and wake up feeling refreshed and ready for a new opportunity and challenge. You will know that you are making a difference to the people and the place where you work.

Remember that **practice makes perfect** and you cannot do what the article says and expect things to change – how you manage, plan, prioritise and communicate needs to become a habit and an integral part of the way you work, so that you can climb the career ladder and achieve your professional goals.

This article was written by Sandra D'Amico, Managing Director of HRINC. It was published in the Phnom Penh Post in January 2009 and updated in August 2015.

"A job isn't just a job, it consumes more than a third of your day – make sure you enjoy what you do and challenge yourself to be creative and do things differently!" Contact hrinc@hrinc.asia for more information