

Three ways to resolve problem with boss

An AAU reader poses the following question:

"What can we do when our managers seem to lose interest in what their staff is doing and deadlines not being met because they're too busy with the 'big picture'? We can see things are falling through the cracks but are not getting support we need from our bosses to prevent it from happening."

Maureen Fitzgerald, a conflict expert, responds.

By Maureen Fitzgerald

There are three things to keep in mind when dealing with other people's behaviour.

First, each person is motivated by different things. Second, 90 per cent of motivation comes from inside each person, not from outside. Third, no one could possibly know all the things that are happening to another person.

So, with this in mind I think you have three options, depending on you and your particular context.

1. The go-it-alone approach.

Make a list of all the things that your manager has done in the last few months that drive you crazy. Try to stick to observable behaviours such as: *She signed the documents on March 25 and I asked for them on March 10.* Then for each fact try to identify a few impacts such as: *I had to work late on March 10 and miss my Pilates class.*

Write these down and then schedule an uninterrupted meeting with your boss. It's best

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not to show her the list, but discuss each item. Do not discuss others' concerns. At the minimum your boss should begin to see the impact of her behaviours on you. You should be able to walk away with an agreement to address your concerns and an action plan.

2. The collaborative approach.

Speak to others casually about what is going on for them. Ask them if they would like to have a meeting to discuss these things. Then go to your boss and ask for a *special department meeting*. If she asks why, simply say that you feel that things are not getting done as efficiently as possible – and perhaps mention a few concerns in only general and constructive terms at this point. Do not tell all or she might try to solve the problems before the meeting. These meetings are best facilitated by a neutral outsider. The meeting should result in a shared understanding of what has been happening, a better understanding of how each person is impacted and an action plan.

3. The leadership approach.

Let many people know you are keen to make everyone's job easier. In the process you should be able to find one or two people who truly support you (champions). Meet with these champions and identify some key problems and a few possible solutions. Then put this in your back pocket, walk into your boss's office when she is clearly not busy and simply say: *I have*

noticed that you have been very busy these days with... (Fill in the space). How can I help you?

Next, sit silently for two full minutes! If she does not say much, probe and say something like, *I have noticed you have not been around as much.*

Try to get her to explain to you what she is experiencing. You can then begin to have an informed dialogue about what could be done. As the conversation progresses, decide just how much you want to share. It's likely you will come up with a creative solution that suits many people.

Pure intention is the key

As you can sense, the key to any of these solutions is what I call *pure intention*. This means that you must truly want to know what is going on and truly want to make things better – for you, your colleagues, your managers and your organization. If you have pure intention, you can't go wrong with any of these strategies. **AAU**

Question for Maureen?

If you're in the middle of a challenging work dilemma, why not ask Maureen? E-mail questions to joycegrant@sympatico.ca and we'll pass along your query.

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