

How to get your boss to “step it up”

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Over the past few years I’ve had some colleagues and clients tell me “I like your advice, but how do I get my boss to follow it?” I tell them: “Have your boss read my column.” And their reply back is something like: “Who’s going to tell him to read it? Not me!” This gets to the heart of a very important question: what is the best way to get your boss to “step it up” and be a better and more enlightened executive without endangering your relationship with him (or her) or putting your career at risk?

Most executives, whether they admit it or not, feel that they have already demonstrated their ability to lead. They don’t read management or leadership books and certainly don’t think they need advice on leadership from their associates. And many of them would probably feel insulted if you gave them a book on leadership, for that action could give implications of a message that they needed help in this area. So what are the answers if you are working for a leader who has deficiencies in style, substance, or both?

One approach is to live with the situation and take lots of notes on how NOT to lead. When the time comes for you to be a leader, you will have a long “do not do” list. I can’t tell you how many times I referred to my “do

not do” list when making important decisions about people, resources, and operations. I avoided many negative outcomes because had I not learned from the occasional bad boss, I could have become one myself. A really bad leader can teach you quite a bit. In fact, it’s not unusual to learn more from a bad leader than a good leader, although the daily agony is painful at the time.

Another way to get your boss to “step it up” is to properly assist them. If you are strong in an area they’re weak, toss them a life raft when they truly need it. Just jump in and help them--perhaps you can teach them something. The idea being that they eventually won’t need your help in this given area and they will become more effective. (A very important thing to consider about this approach is to offer your help privately if they have not asked for it [or if they ask you in private], and publicly when they ask in front of the team or through a group email. Privacy, when warranted, is important because some bosses could become vindictive if they take a public, unsolicited offer to help as a sign of criticism.)

Another approach that may work is to suggest to the organization’s big boss that a subordinate leader be given an opportunity to attend a first-rate management or leadership program and to report back to senior leaders on the

insights that he or she gained from the experience. Don’t mention your boss’s name--just let your suggestion be made in the best interest of the organization. There are some great programs at the Center for Creative Leadership at Greensboro, North Carolina. Go to www.ccl.org to learn more.

If funds are tight or the organization is against releasing someone for one to four weeks, then suggest a professional reading program in which the organization purchases books or subscribes to professional magazines that focus on effective leadership and management. Many people prefer magazines or columns over books due to the time commitment associated with reading a book. *Real Leaders Magazine* and *Industry Leaders Magazine* are two good magazines of which to subscribe. Or let your organization know about this column. Approximately 14,000 professionals across America log in each week to read it for free.

It can be frustrating working for a boss who is slipping and sliding all over the place. Either help him or her gain traction or remove the slippery surface. If you care about your organization, want to succeed, or aspire to move up in the world, then help your boss “step it up” or you both could be at risk of being told to “step down.”

~ The End ~