



Put away the hammer

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COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: It can really be frustrating at work sometimes, especially when my boss doesn’t do what I suggest. Sometimes I repeat myself to him over and over and it’s like it goes in one of his ears and out the other. At least he takes the heat when things go wrong. How can I hammer home my suggestions and get him to do what I say? I honestly feel like I know better being on the front lines.

FRONT-LINE EXPERT



DEAR FRONTLINE EXPERT: It’s always a good feeling when people acknowledge and execute your ideas or suggestions but when it comes to your boss, he isn’t obligated to do what you say. How do you know you know better than your boss? Sometimes bosses are privy to information that subordinates have no access to. Other times bosses have to take orders from their boss regardless what input subordinates give. So have some empathy and patience with your boss if other external factors are having an impact on his role.

Additionally, are you communicating your points of view clearly and in a manner your boss can understand? Are you communicating with your

boss during a time that is beneficial or advantageous for you to do so? Are you communicating in a mode or channel your boss prefers or expects? Are you communicating to your boss when he is in a good mood? If your answer to any of these questions is no then you need to readjust and reengage.

Investment expert Warren Buffet said, “Sometimes it’s not how hard you row the boat. It’s how fast the stream is going.” Whenever you’re dealing with your boss, pay attention to flow of his stream. If the timing is right, make your point. If it’s not, save it for later.

As a productive front-line worker, you are responsible for communicating important issues and suggestions from your vantage point where the rubber meets the road. But it’s one thing to communicate and another to coerce your boss. The choice your boss makes is not your responsibility. Besides, if you made your point clearly, I doubt you’ll help your cause by continuing to hammer away at it. It will only make you annoying in your boss’s mind. Think about it. If you were a leader at your company, wouldn’t you be annoyed by someone constantly repeating their suggestion to you at various times throughout the day?

Although you have no formal management authority on the front lines,

you can still continue to demonstrate good leadership by looking for ways to improve processes and work activities. When you discover something that will benefit the front lines and/or the company, organize your communication effort so you can swiftly, effectively, and convincingly inform someone who has the proper authority to make changes. Think of this endeavor as “one shot” to get it right.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “You do not lead by hitting people over the head—that’s assault, not leadership.” If you keep repeating yourself after your point’s been made, you’re just trying to get your own way. Don’t be “that guy!” Learn to let it go. Remain loyal to your boss, even when he doesn’t act on your suggestion. I’d have to imagine if you sustain your track record of being right, eventually your boss will begin taking your advice more seriously. If not, your days of becoming the boss might be sooner than you think! And when that happens, you can do everything you suggest!



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