

Contagious LEADERSHIP Article Series, by Monica Wofford

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR BOSS and still manage to keep your job

Word count: 999

John was always being questioned about his expenditures and whether or not he was going to be able to finish a project on deadline. He had come through each time before and at the Director level, he really thought they would learn to trust him by now, but his boss, Mark just couldn't seem to get there. Mark was a Vice President who had the President and CFO breathing down his neck and made decisions based on who held the most authority rather than what he sometimes knew what was best for the business.

This made it almost impossible for John to function without managing his bosses. John was responsible for customizing a new product for their largest client. It was clear that he would need more than his usual charm and wit to get this done. Clearly, his authority would only take him so far. Mark had already told him the budget freeze was coming and John was trying to please his client before they tied his hands completely. Yet, he knew that if he didn't get Mark and his managers on board in a hurry, he would be setting himself up for the greatest mistake of his career. It all hinged on how well he could manage his boss and others up the chain.

Ever been there? Yes, your boss has authority, but it is not necessarily always the final answer. There are times when influence and upward management is appropriate. The key is to know the difference between authority, power, and influence and when to use each. It is a fine line to walk but it might allow you to still finish that project, hire that person, or do what you think is best for your department or company.

Authority is title based and often quietly supported by the size of your office. It gives you a "say so" and maybe a vote, but only to the next veto level. Power is personal and is based on how others perceive you. It is possible to manage your boss with power alone if you have a large loyal following and many respect you more than your boss. However, you will be more successful if you manage your boss using influence. This is your ability to persuade, bring others with you and rally support, all while still embracing the purpose and passion that drives your boss's directions. That is your first and most important step.

Understand Passion and Purpose

There is usually a good reason for your boss's directions. You may disagree, but in order to exert influence, you must respect and understand the "big picture" behind it. With sincere interest, ask what is behind the decision being made? What is the benefit to

the company or his department? What are the risks? Armed with this kind of information you will be seen as a business partner, rather than a disgruntled employee who didn't get her way. Once you have this knowledge, ask for support on finding a new solution that is mindful of the risks, will provide the same benefits and maybe more, and will still fit in with the larger picture. Tap into the passion behind the decision. Influence is best utilized with the support of your boss who may have merely run out of ideas, but is willing to let you see what you can do within certain guidelines.

Bring Others with You

The first person you bring with you is your boss by questions and gaining the support you needed to move forward. If you operate from a genuine interest in his motives, you will find the same is needed for each person that you want to bring with you. Pay attention to what drives them, not what your end goal is. The more you focus on the needs of others, the more you will be able to tap into their internal motivation toward your project. Those with influence do far more listening than telling, far more asking than directing. They genuinely care about the needs of others and they seek to have everyone reap the benefits from their own efforts.

Be Compelling

Enthusiasm around what you are doing is a must. These feelings will come across when you talk to others and will be "contagious". Be clear in why you think your way is the right way without casting dispersions on other options or directions. Those who are respectfully able to see your viewpoint will be the ones you have the most influence over. The more clearly you have thought out your reasons, the more likely you will be able to compel others to follow out of their own desire to be a part of that plan.

Build Powerful Rapport

In the publishing world, this is called, surround yourself with the "Big Mouths", those in your particular field of interest who will eagerly spread the word about your book. The same is true in your organization. There are those in higher positions of power who can give you their support which will elevate your influence with others. Find those that are willing to support your idea and put their name behind it. Always include the fact that your boss is aware of what you doing and make it safe for them to support your actions.

It is not always possible to work around a direct request. It is not always necessary. But

the reality is that we work side by side with other humans and they are not always at their creative best or at the top of their game. Managing your boss is about influencing those around you, a rallying of the troops, to get something done that your boss sees no way to accomplish. It is not about cutting your boss out of the loop. That is dangerous proposition and may manager your way out of job. When you don't have absolute authority, use your personal power combined with influence. You have more of both of those than you may think.

About the Author

Monica Wofford brings more than 17 years of experience as a business consultant, trainer, and speaker to the needs of her clients. A sought-after trainer and President of Monica Wofford International, Inc., Wofford leverages scientific research and data to design curricula and presentations that positively impact behavior and performance, and provide lasting results. She is the author of "Contagious Leadership", "Contagious Confidence," and "Contagious Customer Service". Wofford can be reached at www.monicawofford.com or (866) 382-0121