

# The Coaching Manager

## 5 Secrets to Managing your Manager Productively

The biggest reason why people leave organisations is that the role they are doing is no longer offering any challenge or excitement. The second reason is due to the behaviour and capability of the immediate line manager. More often than not, the two are strongly linked with the manager taking little interest in the representative's development and as such the representative feels under valued and bored due to the lack of attention and challenge.

Often the blame is laid at the manager's door, but the representative must take a share of the responsibility also. What normally happens is that expectations are not laid out "on the table" with both parties unaware of each other's needs, motivations and expectations. The end result is often a lack of trust and respect between employee and manager which leads inevitably to conflict.

So how can you avoid this conflict and start to work productively with your manager? Act on these five secrets and watch your relationship grow.

**Secret 1:** Learn about behavioural styles and find out what your own is and your manager's. Compare the two and if there are differences then work on these differences by matching your manager's body language very discreetly. Match their tone and volume of voice, remembering not to mimic only discreetly match. Look at their eye movements and do similar. Again, do similar with body movements. When you start to discreetly match their body language you will be amazed that they start to match yours also. This is the start of the rapport building process and this goes a long way to start the building of trust.

**Secret 2:** Contract with your manager by getting agreement about how best the two of you are going to work together. Ask questions such as:

“What are your specific expectations of me as your representative?”  
“What are my specific objectives and how am I going to be measured?”  
“What behaviours annoy you?”  
“What motivates and de-motivates you?”  
“What reports do you want? When do you want them? What content?”  
“How often do you want to visit me in the field?”

Contracting is all about managing expectations. A good manager will always outline his or her expectations and will ask you about yours. Once you both are clear about what each other's expectations are then this is another building block in the foundations of trust and respect.

One of the hardest lessons I learned was when I did not contract with a senior manager. We had completely opposite behavioural styles, which meant that we didn't get off to the best start. He thought I was too energetic, flighty and too much of a risk taker and I thought he was too detailed with no personality and constantly stuck in front of spreadsheets. We were in constant conflict because he asked me for reports that I could see no reason for and I was frustrated when he ignored my pleas for more training budget. If we had contracted and discussed our similarities and differences and how best to work with them, we may not have had the conflict that we did have.

**Secret 3:** Ask for regular feedback on your progress. Ask your manager to coach and mentor you. Be pro-active and do not wait for your manager to come to you. On the other hand do not always be seen to be reliant on your manager and give them space. Agree this area of support in your contract.

**Secret 4:** Be seen to be a support for your manager. Management can be lonely and stressful particularly if the manager isn't managing their boss particularly well or if the company and/or team results are not doing as well as expected. Be supportive and offer to take on extra tasks. These tasks will not only make space for the manager to work more productively and strategically they will also enable you to develop your own capabilities.

**Secret 5:** Go with your instincts! If you feel that the relationship with your manager is starting to go sour, then immediately call a meeting and openly discuss your feelings. To make this easier than it may sound, again build it into your contract right at the start. Something like, “If I feel our relationship is not what it should be, can I address it immediately as opposed to letting it linger?”

Relationships between managers and representatives usually deteriorate because there was little trust in the first place and as a result openness is not usually achieved. Follow the five secrets and you will go a long way to ensuring a lasting and productive relationship with your manager.

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