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Managing Up: Subtle but Effective Communication with the “Powers That Be”

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Managing Up:

Subtle but Effective Communication with the “Powers That Be”

In learning to communicate with the “powers that be” in our institutions, it is valuable to appreciate and understand the four basic social styles that are presented in numerous works. The more assertive styles are: analytical and driver whereas the more responsive styles are: amiable and expressive. Understanding our style and that of the individual we wish to influence is a vital part of being successful in our endeavors. The article that served as a springboard explained the styles and means of adapting our style to ensure better communication.

In addition to discussing social styles, we touched on: dealing with new bosses, different communication styles, communication problems, chain of command issues and collaboration. Some keys to effective communication are:

- Keeping the boss current via monthly reports.
- Recognizing the culture of the campus as to whether or not the chain of command was followed.
- Have a five minute library moment during faculty meetings.
- Put a newsletter out.
- Pick your battles.
- Have your boss’s favorite candy.

We really had more questions than answers during this session and most in attendance felt that we could continue this discussion at conference in 2007. Some of the issues that arose were:

- When does one go over the boss’s head?
- Inconsistent behavior, underlying concerns and unspoken agenda.
- Sometimes the reporter is not one who makes the decision
- Dealing with unofficial points of contact
- Sometimes managing is determined by the predecessor who may or may not have been affective.

- How much do you push?
- What do you do if you have several bosses.
- How to handle multiple messages going out of the library ... talking out of turn
- When the boss doesn’t give credit where it is due.

The readings below are varied. Rosanne Badowski in **Managing Up: How to Forge an Effective Relationship with Those Above You** is very “down to earth” and writes on the topic from her personal experience of working with Jack Welch (General Electric’s CEO) over a period of fourteen years. **Managing Up: 59 Ways to Build a Career Advancing Relationship with Your Boss** is a very practical instruction manual complete with exercises with each chapter to drive the point home.

Although we didn’t come away with easy answers, our group was unified regarding the importance of this topic and the desire to continue this discussion in upcoming conferences. Meanwhile, let’s be on the lookout for those who are having success in this area and seek to discover their secret. Doing so will not only have an impact on our relationship with our boss but may also affect the welfare of our institutions as a whole in the days ahead. ☩

SUGGESTED READING:

- Badowski, R. (2003). *Managing Up: How to Forge an Effective Relationship with Those Above You*. New York: Doubleday.
- Bing, S. (2002). *Throwing the Elephant: Zen and the Art of Managing Up*. New York: Harper.
- Cohen, C. (March 2004). Managing Up: Getting to Know Your Boss is Just Another Way to Help Mend a Poor Working Relationship. *CA Magazine*, 39-40.
- Darling, J.R., Cluff, E.D. (1987). Social Styles and the Art of Managing Up. *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 12(6), 350-55.
- Dobson, M. and Singer Dobson, D. (2000). *Managing Up: 59 Ways to Build a Career Advancing Relationship with Your Boss*. New York: AMACOM.

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A Roundtable Discussion

ABSTRACT:

There are plenty of resources on managing employees but only in recent years has there been an emphasis on managing those to whom we report. The article entitled “Social Styles and the Art of Managing Up” by John R. Darling published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* in 1987 was the springboard for a lively discussion that included seven library directors and eight individuals from a variety of positions.

Gabarro, J.J. and Kotter, J.P. (Jan – Feb 1980). Managing Your Boss. *Harvard Business Review* 58 (1), 92-100.

Laabs, J. (August 2000). Managing-Up Secrets: I Did It the Boss’s Way. *Workforce*, 22.

Simpson, L. (August 2002). Why Managing Up Matters. *Harvard Management Update*, 3-5.