



MIIA Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

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Supervisor Sandwich—The Meat of Middle Management

“Most important, leaders can conceive and articulate goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations and unite them in pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts.” John Gardner

This article concludes a series of four on inter-performance: the behavior of individuals in relation to each other, within a department, team, or work force; that results in high productivity and high morale.

Supervisors and middle managers occupy **demanding roles as both leaders and followers**. They require skills in both “**managing up**” and “**managing down**.” Sometimes supervisors will have more than one boss to whom they report, requiring additional skills in prioritization and coordination. Squeezed between the expectations of production quotas or deadlines from above, and needs for direction, instruction, and motivation from below, a supervisor may find him or herself in a **vulnerable place to absorb the major stresses** of an organization. Like a switchboard operator or an air traffic controller, the supervisor must make sure that the energetic outputs of the organization keep moving, without running into each other.

Skilled leaders get things done through others. According to author Stephen P. Robbins, **good leaders have high, but not unreasonable expectations of their direct reports**. When a leader expects high performance he or she is likely to allocate resources, training, and encouragement to those employees from whom excellent results are expected. They tend to give those employees challenging work assignments and projects, and offer them more trust.

Successfully managing down requires supervisors to **give employees the tools** they need to accomplish the job as well as the **training**. Let employees know what results you want but **let them think for themselves** on how to accomplish them. Set high, but reasonable expectations for your employees as well as for yourself. Let employees know **what the priorities** are and put them first. Be **willing to do anything you ask an employee** to do and be seen doing it from time to time. **Recognize and praise employees** for their contributions. Remain interested in, and aware of, what employees are doing without breathing down their necks. Let employees know and offer thoughts about whatever project is in the pipeline.

“Effective leadership is putting first things first.” Stephen Covey



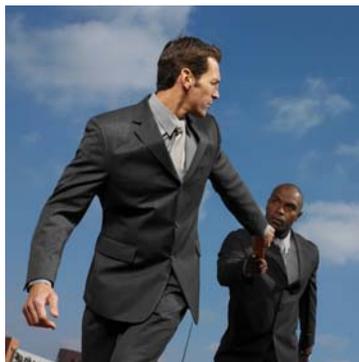
Good followers are exemplified by those who **manage themselves well by thinking and working independently**; who are **committed to a purpose outside themselves**—"a cause, a product, a work team, an organization, an idea;" who build their **skills to a higher standard** than what their work group or job requires; and who are "courageous, honest, and credible." When people are able to think for themselves, to hold themselves to high standards, to **acknowledge credit where it is due** and to **admit mistakes freely**, then they are not only following well, but developing the skills for leadership.

In a paper by Lt. Col. Sharon M. Latour and colleague, of the United States Air Force, she refers to social scientist Robert E. Kelley's **four types of follower: The "Sheep," the "Yes People," the "Alienated Followers," and the "Effective Followers."** While the first two types lack initiative and are passive, the alienated followers criticize and are "turned off" even though they may passively fulfill their roles. Only the **effective followers** possess the **traits of high participation and critical thinking**. Effective followers **disagree when they need to**, exercise **good judgment, self-manage, are committed, and have competence, credibility, and focus**.

"The good teacher discovers the natural gifts of his pupils and liberates them by the stimulating influence of the inspiration he can impart. The true leader makes his followers twice the men they were before." Stephen Neill

Management consultant Wayne Turk suggests several useful guidelines for **managing up**. First and foremost is establishing **two-way communication with the boss**. Make sure you **understand the boss's wants and decisions**. Play it back to make sure you have it right. Then **offer regular reports** on what is happening in your group. E-mails, phone calls, quick or formal meetings can be determined by consultation with your boss. When there are problems, **communicate not only the problems but also your ideas for solving them**. Maintain impeccable **honesty**. Problems and even failures must be presented in a timely fashion. This builds **all-important trust**, and trust directly correlates with the speed of success. Don't assume you know what your boss wants. Ask. Understand her preferences and perspectives. **Recognize your boss's strengths as well as weaknesses** and utilizes the strengths. No one is good at everything. Try to fill in where your boss has a weakness. **Request feedback** from your boss and accept it. It is the only way to stay in touch with your relationship, your perceived contributions to the workplace, and what you need to do to continue to improve. Recognize that **"we play a part in the way someone treats us,"** according to author Adam Khan.

"The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on."
Walter Lippman



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