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# REBUILDING A DAMAGED RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BOSS

BY MS. CAREER GIRL | 95 | 0

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You and your boss do not see eye-to-eye. You disagree not just on a report or a policy, but it seems like every topic you discuss is a struggle. Every morning you wake up feeling drained and helpless. After all, what can you do? Maybe you just need to find another job. You're also tired of feeling like everything that you do is wrong. Your boss finds a mistake in all of the work projects you do. You can't really remember the last time your boss gave you a compliment. Your motivation is in the toilet.

Perhaps the above portrayal is a bit extreme. Maybe it reflects some of your relationship with your boss, but not all of it. The bottom line is that you don't have a good relationship with your boss. If the relationship is really bad, the first step is to find a way to talk to your boss.

Initially, it should be about a work project and some questions about the best way to move forward. Find something significant, not simple, where there is a real conflict, and you need help figuring something out. For example, you have conflicting project deadlines and you're not sure which one would be the best one to prioritize for the team. Ask your boss for help, and then gain further understanding of why the one they choose would be their priority. Discover more about your boss's needs and how you can support them better.



Based on that conversation, agree with your boss that you are going to take on one of the things they mention to support them. Chat through a quick plan and then do your research. Get as much information as you can about the situation. For example, your boss says that they feel stretched because there are some technical conflicts with another group. Each group is convinced that their way is the right way, but it is leading to implementation issues as both groups have different pieces of the same puzzle. Make friends with people in the other group and study the problem. Come up with a solution and present that to your boss, of course, after you have received input from others that the solution would work.

Once your boss sees that you're trying to support them, you can approach them on the relationship issues. For example, ask your boss for some positive feedback about your work. Ask: What do you like about the work I completed on Project X? Then listen to the feedback – use active listening, so paraphrasing and reflecting feelings. If the feedback they give is negative, listen first, and then ask the question again, but worded differently, e.g. What did I contribute that helped so that I can continue to do that? Then ask your boss for permission to give them feedback. Of course, this is risky, so you may want to make sure the relationship is on solid footing, but if your gut tells you the timing is right, then give your feedback.

When you give feedback to your boss, eliminate the word "you". The minute you say something like "You never give me positive feedback", or, "You always seem to find something wrong with my work", you will put your boss on the defensive. You need to disclose about it, so instead say: "I am confused about Project X, because it seems as if I may not be understanding what is required? Help me understand your expectations, as I seem to be unclear about them?" After your boss has answered you, paraphrase their answer – no matter what it is. Then disclose again and say, "I don't remember when you stated that during the project set up – perhaps the requirements changed?" Then you can give your feedback and say, "I feel as if I am not getting enough guidance and that we don't meet regularly enough so that I can stay up to speed with project changes. Would you be open to meeting regularly?"



Managing upward and building that relationship takes time and intention. You need to create an objective and plan out your influence approach. You have the power to change the dynamics of any relationship, as you are 50% responsible for all relationships. If the other person will not shift and you have given it your best shot, then it may be time to reassess your situation and perhaps consider a move. The potential for improving the relationship with your boss is always there, though. If you shift yourself, the other person most likely will shift, too.

***This guest post was authored by Sherri Malouf, PhD***



*Sherri is the President of Situation Management Systems, Inc., a leadership training consultancy, and the author of [Science and the Leader-Follower Relationship](#).*

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