

Getting along with the boss

NO MATTER how you earn a living, one occupational skill you'd do well to cultivate is a knack for getting along with the boss—that dispenser of raises and promotions and probably the key person in your working life. In most places it's your boss's opinion of you that determines your future in the company. A worker in constant conflict with his supervisor, even if he's a virtuoso performer on the job, can find his prospects considerably dimmed.

Short of marrying his daughter, what can you do to get into the boss's good graces and stay there? Fortunately, most bosses aren't ogres, so they respond to efforts to improve relationships with them. Here are suggestions for making yourself more valuable to the man or woman you work for, based on the observations of managers and job counselors.

Help him do his job. You accomplish this by doing *your* job as best you can. An obvious piece of advice? Perhaps, but it's probably the most frequently forgotten. Keep in mind how your job ties in with your boss's. He's responsible for seeing that a certain set of tasks is accomplished, be it writing insurance policies, assembling machine parts or selling dresses. Your job is to tend to some detail of his task. The better you hold up your end, the easier his job is, which is bound to make him look more kindly on you.

Get to know his standards. Your performance is judged by them. By noting your boss's reaction to different ways things are done, you learn what's especially important to him. For example, a secretary who prides herself on her shorthand and typing speed may be surprised to find herself passed up for a promotion if she ignores her boss's frequent complaints about her spelling errors. Likewise, a super salesman whose supervisor has to remind him constantly to turn in his sales reports on time may not be considered when it comes time to pick a new sales manager for his territory. If you were a boss,



would you promote someone who has to be hounded again and again about the same old mistakes or shortcomings?

The smart worker gets to know his boss's personal set of dos and don'ts and avoids violating them as much as possible. Where the rules seem silly, try doing things that way for at least a while. If you just can't adapt, you may have a boss you don't *want* to get along with.

Keep him informed. When the boss gives you an assignment, especially a long-term one, he'll want to be kept informed about how you're coming along. You can keep him up-to-date with short memos now and then or by mentioning your progress during informal conversations with him. If it's a complicated report, better put it in writing. Especially if you work with relatively little supervision, it's a good idea to let your supervisor know periodically what you're doing. Tell him about ideas you may get for streamlining the way you do your job (*not* the way he does his) only if you've

carefully thought them through and can explain them clearly.

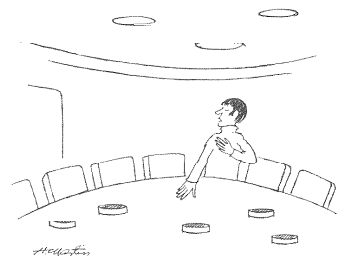
Don't take too much of his time. Spare the boss the details of your weekend camping trip unless he expresses a definite interest. There's a time and place for swapping stories and if your boss wants to pass some time that way, he'll take the initiative.

Be careful also about bending his ear every time a minor problem comes up in the shop or office. True, he's there to help solve problems, but you can often find the answer without bothering him. You want the boss to notice you for the problems you *solve*, not the ones you *toss* in his lap.

Be reliable. Get to work on time. Finish your assignments when you're supposed to. Show the boss that when he needs something done in a hurry, you're the one who'll give it the extra effort needed. If he knows he can depend on you, he will. That's a real feather in your cap.

Be enthusiastic about your work. One of the most difficult problems bosses face is motivating a worker who sees his job as little more than a necessary evil in the pursuit of a paycheck. Managers know they can't teach enthusiasm and they can't buy it no matter how high the wages, but they place much value on it.

If your enthusiasm is genuine, it will show. Do you take pride in your work? Are you willing to come early and stay late when necessary? Are you optimistic about the future of the company you work for? Do you tackle assignments cheerfully, without trying to think up reasons why they just can't be done? If your



"Gentlemen, I may be just an office boy, but I am also a human being."

answers to these questions are completely negative, maybe you're in the wrong job.

Learn to take criticism. The inability to accept constructive criticism and advice—from supervisors and co-workers alike—is a serious handicap. If you do a slow burn every time the boss points out your mistakes, he's bound to feel uncomfortable about it and is likely to resent your attitude. After all, guiding and correcting your work is part of his job. Listen to what he tells you and apply his suggestions to what you're doing. Temperamental workers, no matter how brilliant, are something most bosses would rather do without.

Don't play office politics. Few things can destroy office morale faster than the presence of gossipers and other thoughtless workers who start or pass along uncomplimentary and embarrassing stories about fellow workers. Ignore office rumors and tend to your business. Don't take sides in disputes between other workers or you may end up a part of the gossip yourself. Resist the temptation to grumble about minor inconveniences caused by management decisions; if you have a legitimate complaint, take it to your boss *privately*. He'll appreciate hearing it from you before he hears it via the grapevine.

Don't compete with the boss. Everybody wants to get ahead on the job, of course. But if you aim to do it by demonstrating to everybody else that you know more about the business than your boss does, watch out. In the first place, you probably don't. And in the second place, you'll find that no one—including your boss's boss—appreciates a worker who constantly goes over his supervisor's head or tries to show him up. If you buck your boss at every turn, downgrade his competence and generally make his life miserable, he prepared to lose when the showdown comes.

Remember, bosses are human too. Chances are your boss isn't the world's foremost authority in his field, so don't expect him to be. He'll make mistakes occasionally. He may be abrupt or grouchy from time to time, as we all are. And when he really applies the heat, it's often because his boss is putting the heat on *him*.

You'll probably never find the perfect boss, just as you'll never be the perfect employee. But in general, your ability to get along with the person you report to can enhance your prospects at every step on the job ladder.