

own responsibilities and priorities, which may have nothing to do with you. Sometimes, a manager can only influence and not control expected outcomes. A typical manager is expected to:

- **Ensure that all work assigned to the team gets done on schedule, within budget and with quality results.** If the team fails to perform well, the manager is usually the first to take the heat—no matter whose fault it is.
- **Perform personnel and administrative duties,** such as hiring and firing, writing performance appraisals and managing budgets. This part of a manager’s job is often time consuming, tedious and a distraction from “the real work.”
- **Respond to employee issues.** Depending on the team, this can be frustrating and exhausting. Many employees don’t see the complete picture, but it’s the manager’s job to deal with each employee’s behavior, complaints and demands. Many “professionals” become surprisingly whiney and unreasonable behind closed doors with their boss. A good manager will respect their privacy and not reveal this unpleasant behavior to others in the office.
- **Accomplish projects assigned by his or her supervisor.** No matter what level of the organization they are on, managers have their own assignments to do, ranging from technical tasks to leading the United Way Campaign.

Being a manager is a difficult job. Not everyone does it well. Your manager may not have sufficient skills to cope with these pressures and to effectively lead your group. How does your boss want—and need—to be treated? The key to getting along with even the most difficult boss is to try to understand him or her, show respect, and accept your manager for who he or she is. Find some common ground—a shared work goal or a hobby—and build a relationship on that. You may be pleasantly surprised that even the most difficult boss lightens up if you show support and respect. Establishing a rapport, will open the door to discussing any difficulties you have with your boss and resolving them. You may discover things you can do to lessen your manager’s stress, and ultimately open up future opportunities for yourself.

Myths about Managers

- All supervisors are out to get you—therefore you can never trust any of them.
- Managers know—or should know—more than you do about all aspects of your job.
- Your supervisor has infinite time to pay attention to you—whenever *you* decide it's time.
- Managers can fix every problem.
- Managers have limitless resources for making improvements, buying new equipment, paying for training, hiring more employees, etc.
- Managers should never have a bad day or be in a bad mood.
- Managers should never make mistakes or bad decisions.
- Managers can read minds.

3. Don't establish close relationships with coworkers too quickly

It might sound a little cold-hearted, but it's in your best interest to take some time to observe your coworkers' behaviors and standing in the office before establishing close relationships with them. Initially, you don't know who the troublemakers are (if any), so why risk adopting their attitudes or being "guilty by association"? Be friendly to everyone, get to know a broad set of your coworkers, and choose your office friends after you've observed their behavior. In the end, you may still choose to befriend the office troublemaker, but you've made the decision consciously.

4. Assess your relationships with your coworkers—and your performance as a teammate

Inevitably, after working with your office mates for a while, you will begin to see their social and personal sides. Developing personal



**“I’ve been making an effort to be less critical.
If you weren’t so self-absorbed, you’d see that!”**

friendships with coworkers can make the job easier and a whole lot more fun.

However, as with everything else, there are pitfalls to avoid as your social and personal side comes out. Be conscious of how much of your personal life you bring into the workplace. Some sharing—like talking about buying a new car or a great movie you just saw—is positive, fostering camaraderie and common interests. Every office expects a reasonable amount of this type of conversation over lunch or at the coffee machine. However, some people take it too far, spending too much time talking about personal matters or discussing topics that are too personal for the office. No one wants to hear about every play you made in your softball game last night, nor do they want to learn all the details of your love life. At the least, you’ll bore your coworkers with this talk. You may also leave the impression that you’re not busy enough at work or not focused on your tasks. Save these discussions for close friends.

Socializing is fun, but one of your most important roles is to be a good teammate to your coworkers. Think of ways you can support

your team and how your behavior might detract from its success. Here are the behaviors of good team players.

- **Understand your team's goals—and put them before any personal agenda.** Understand your role and your teammates' roles in achieving those goals.
- **Meet your commitments.** Report your outcomes on time, and produce quality results. Attend team meetings—and be there on time. Give the appropriate people a heads-up if you will not be able to meet a commitment.
- **Don't shy away from problems.** Confront the facts of the situation and offer possible solutions. Maintain a positive, can-do attitude, even in difficult times.
- **Welcome diverse opinions.** Ensure all viewpoints are explored. Communicate ideas openly, honestly and thoroughly, and encourage teammates to do the same. Avoid defensiveness. Challenge ideas, not people.
- **Support the success of your team leader and your teammates.** Compliment good performance. Respond to dispirited teammates with patience, empathy and encouragement.
- **Contribute to team cohesiveness.** Demonstrate loyalty to your team leader and teammates. Support team decisions. Avoid creating cliques with inside jokes. Respect authority.
- **Be a person others enjoy being with.** Demonstrate self-reliance, competence, enthusiasm and a willingness to go the extra mile for your team. Observe confidentiality.

5. Comply with the “rules” for interacting with other positions in the organization

One important element of diversity in your workplace is the different types of positions you work with: executives, administrative assistants, “represented workers,” vendors and consultants. Some organizations have formal policies that govern how people in these different positions should interact with each other. Breaking these rules can result in financial penalties for your organization.

In other organizations, the rules for interaction may be real, but undocumented. For example, some corporations strongly discourage managers from socializing with their employees—even having lunch!—to avoid the appearance of favoritism. In other workplaces, anything goes. Here, it’s hard for a visitor to distinguish the top executive from the lowest person in the office pecking order. Use the techniques described in Chapter 3, *Learning the Ground Rules*, to learn the rules and common conventions that govern various levels of interaction in your organization.

6. Develop a mentor

Having a mentor isn’t essential to career success, but it certainly doesn’t hurt. What is a mentor? Typically, a mentor is an older, more experienced person who acts as a role model, advisor or coach to a less experienced employee. While good managers provide coaching, a mentor is typically outside the employee’s immediate management chain. Mentors can help jump-start a career by providing advice, sharing experience and perspective, and expanding opportunities for development. Initially, mentoring relationships tend to be one-way, with the more experienced person helping the less experienced employee. The most effective mentoring relationships evolve over time so that the relationship becomes two-way, and both members contribute in some way to the other’s success. Mentoring relationships can become very close, but they remain professional in nature. Mentors can also change over time, depending where you go with your career and the needs of both parties.

While it’s valuable to have a mentor, you can’t just ask someone to be yours. Some companies make it easy by assigning a “mentor” when an employee is hired. Like your first college roommate, the match may not be ideal, but take advantage of it. Other companies don’t formally assign mentors, but do provide the opportunity to interact with more senior employees, including upper-level management, on “extra-curricular” assignments like college recruiting. This is often the ideal way to find a good mentor, but you’ll have to take some initiative to develop the relationship. You’ll have to work the hardest at getting a mentor if neither of these opportunities is available to you.

Regardless of your situation, here are steps you can take to find the best mentor for you.

- **Set your goals for having a mentor.** Why do you want one? What do you hope this person can do for you? Perhaps you want a person with similar interests or career aspirations who can help guide your way. Perhaps you want someone who is very different from you and will help expand your perspective or thought process.
- **Knowing your goals, look around for candidate mentors.** Who makes the most sense from your list? Is the candidate at an appropriate level in the organization (not too high or low)? Are there any problems accessing your candidates on a regular basis, such as geographic distance? Can you make the initial contact? Think outside the box. Sometimes a service project or non-work-related activity is the best way to make contact with a potential mentor.
- **Initiate the relationship in a way that will put you in the best light.** You want to make a good first impression. Often, it's best to start by doing a favor for the prospective mentor. You might volunteer for a job or share knowledge that's useful to him or her. Your objective is to get noticed as a valued contributor, not as a person seeking to advance your career. If doing a favor doesn't fit your situation, you might arrange a meeting to ask advice on a specific, narrowly focused issue, like how you can improve your skills in your prospective mentor's area of expertise. Generally, experienced people are happy to share their knowledge and insights.
- **Behave in ways that foster the relationship:**
 1. *Demonstrate interest in learning more about your job and improving your performance.* Ask genuine questions and act on the answers.
 2. *Be receptive to the coaching you receive.* Listen carefully to feedback and evaluate whether it makes sense and if you can follow the advice. Thank the person for the input.
 3. *Only request help for things that really matter.* Show good

judgment in making requests of your mentor, and demonstrate a degree of self-reliance.

4. *Continue to find ways to give back to the mentor in meaningful ways.* Few relationships are successful and lasting when one party does all the giving and the other does all the taking.
5. *Perform as well as you can on the job.* Mentors give up their personal time to coach their “mentees.” They want to see a return on their investment.

SUMMARY

Enjoy and respect the differences you observe in other people. What a dull world it would be if everyone were alike! The differences you observe can be fascinating and offer you a great opportunity to learn and grow.

Differences can contribute to stronger performance. Teams made up of diverse members who respect each other’s differences often produce more creative, higher quality results than more homogeneous teams. You’ll have no trouble managing your office relationships if you observe these two key points:

1. *Understand the other person—then have patience and respect for him or her.*
2. *Understand how your opinions and behavior affect those around you.*

Successfully managing all your office relationships is as important to your on-the-job success as accomplishing assigned tasks competently. Invest the time and have fun!

FAQs:

- Q. I just started a new job, and I think I’m going to be miserable. Even though everyone is nice to me, there isn’t anyone my age who shares my interests. I won’t have any friends. Should I look for a new job?*

A: If you recently left a college environment, you are probably used to hanging around with friends who are close to you in age and interests. The crowd you're in may even define a big part of your identity. While work can be fun, your reason for being there is to get a job done, not to socialize. Since you will spend many hours with your coworkers, it is important that you establish a good rapport with them, but you'll find it isn't necessary to be best friends outside of work. In fact, many people like to maintain a strict separation of their professional and personal lives to give themselves a break from work, and maintain some privacy when in the office. Look for close personal friends in your recreational activities, your apartment complex or your old gang of friends.

At the same time, don't write off these people in the office who are different from you. Everyone has something to offer: an unexpected sense of humor, a fascinating personal experience or an enviable talent. If you allow yourself to get past your differences, you are likely to enjoy and even learn from the diversity. You'll also discover that "friendship" has more dimensions than what you've experienced in your friendships with your peers.

Q: *I absolutely cannot get along with the person I share a cubicle with. He is loud and offends me with jokes about politics and religion. Should I complain to my manager about this guy?*

A: You don't want to ask your supervisor to mediate every problem you encounter at work. Chances are you'll either look like a whiner or like you are incapable of resolving issues yourself. Try dealing directly with this guy. The next time he acts up, try a non-judgmental but straightforward statement like, "John, I can't concentrate on my work when you're joking around. Can you save it for later?" Or, "We seem to have a different sense of humor. I find your jokes about religion offensive. Please share them with someone else." Hopefully, your cube mate is a professional and will get the message. A few friendly reminders may be required before he cleans up his act.

Some people can't or won't change the way they behave. If this guy's behavior is so obnoxious that it prevents you from getting your work done, chances are that you're not the only one who is bothered by him. Your boss has probably noticed, too. A short, private conversation with your boss may be in order. Outline what you want to say beforehand, focusing on the behavior, how it interferes with your work and what steps you've already tried to remedy the situation. Don't attack your coworker's character, and be sure to curb your emotion. Listen carefully to any suggestions your manager has. If you respond with a statement like "that will never work," you might look like you are part of the problem. After your conversation, try out whatever was suggested and be patient. Your manager may take action that you are not privy to, and it could take "the system" a while to respond.

No one says you have to like everyone you work with. Be friendly to everyone, and politely keep your distance from the people you don't much care for. You never know who will be working for whom in the future.

Q: *I'm really attracted to one of my coworkers, and I'm pretty sure he feels the same way about me. Is it OK to date people in the office?*

A: Dating a coworker is dangerous business! Certainly people do, since many married couples will tell you they met at work. The more closely you work, the riskier dating is. And it's never acceptable to date a married coworker.

Before you date a fellow employee, make sure there isn't a company policy prohibiting it. Why risk losing your job over someone who may turn out to be a jerk? Next, think hard about how your past relationships have ended. Since most relationships don't lead to marriage, you may end up working with someone you broke up with or worse, someone who dumped you!

If you decide to risk it anyway, keep your relationship strictly private. Public displays of affection or adoration are unprofessional and unacceptable. Confiding in an office mate or

two may make you the topic of office gossip. Jealous employees may attribute your office accomplishments to favoritism if you're dating someone more senior to you. Finally, all eyes will be on you when your probable breakup occurs. Proceed with caution . . . and discretion!

Q: *I am very shy to start with. With all the people in my office knowing so much more than me, I'm really intimidated. What can I do to feel comfortable with my coworkers?*

A: There are a few fairly easy things you can do. First, have faith that the vast majority (if not all) of your coworkers are good people, who will readily accept you as part of the team. Show interest and effort in doing a good job, and you'll find that most people are quick to reach out to help you. Finally, start to feel more comfortable in social settings by asking questions that demonstrate your interest in getting to know your coworkers. Most people love to talk about themselves, especially if they have an interested audience. Try asking a few appropriate questions: "Tell me about your family." "I heard you are an English-as-a-second-language tutor. How did you get started?" "I noticed a photo of Paris on your desk. Did you go there recently?" Personal items in your coworkers' work areas are great clues to what is important to them. Show some interest, and you're sure to get a good conversation going that will soon lead to comfortable relations.