

Why Being a ‘Yes-Man’ Isn’t in Your Best Interest — or Your Boss’s

Like many managers in today’s workplace, your boss is probably feeling the strain of a tough economy. He or she may be under pressure to deliver better results with fewer resources. To enhance your job security and ease stress on your manager, it’s important to be a supportive and cooperative employee, yet someone who isn’t afraid to speak up if you’re confident your boss and the company can benefit from your perspective. Here are some suggestions for striking the right balance:

Communicate right. Your supervisor needs to be informed about the status of your projects, but there’s a fine line between keeping your manager in the loop and communicating too much just to gain points. Especially in today’s offices where e-mail and instant messaging make it easy to share your every thought or copy others on action items, keep in mind that moderation is key. Most bosses don’t want to be spammed with the minutiae of your projects or copied on every client communication. If you feel you may not be communicating with your supervisor to the extent he or she would like or using the preferred method, don’t hesitate to ask. Your efforts to fine-tune the flow of information should be appreciated.

Be honest. Although bosses always appreciate cooperative team members, they also crave candid feedback. Don’t feel that you have to greet every suggestion or directive from your manager with unbridled enthusiasm. It’s acceptable to question the wisdom of a new strategy or process or simply to ask for more context. As long as you’re not overly critical or negative in response to every new development, your boss should view you as someone who can be counted on to respond honestly to work-related issues. When a final decision is made on a matter, however, be supportive of your manager and make the most of the situation, even if you suggested an alternative course. Sulking rarely helps one earn points with the boss.

Offer to help. When managers most need to delegate projects, they’re often too overwhelmed to do so. If your boss appears to be deluged, look for something to take off his or her plate. Maybe there’s a client issue that needs troubleshooting or an internal financial report that is awaiting a second review. Approaching your boss and offering to assume a specific project may make it easier to delegate. An added benefit is that your manager will likely gain renewed appreciation for you as a team player.

Avoid blindsiding. No one likes unpleasant surprises, especially not the person who is supposed to know what’s going on in a department or work group. With this in mind, raise your awareness about which issues or clients are of particular interest to your boss. When it comes to these important or sensitive matters, be sure to alert your supervisor to any developments or setbacks. Forewarned is forearmed, and managers who receive early notice of problems may be able to step in to mitigate them.

Give credit where due. Even if you don’t always see eye-to-eye with your supervisor, you can probably find opportunities to shine a positive light. If your manager has been instrumental in helping the company find cost savings, praise him or her to higher-ups

and others in your organization. You don't want to be insincere in your praise, but it's savvy to extend credit for a job well done. On the flip side, avoid public criticism of the boss. When it comes to workplace relationships, the adage, "Don't say anything if you can't say something nice" holds especially true.

Maintaining a good relationship with your manager is always important, but it may be even more so in light of business uncertainty. You need to stay in your boss's good graces to thrive in a difficult professional environment. Just as important though, your manager needs you to provide constructive feedback and support so that he or she can lead your work group successfully. By heeding these tips, you should be able to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship.

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