Managing Up
Using Influence & Collaboration
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Influence and collaboration are terms with fairly universal definitions, unlike the phrase managing up. It is not uncommon for that phrase to be viewed negatively in the professional world, much like brownnosing and kissing up. This article aims to explain what managing up truly is, why it is necessary for professional success and how to do it well. In particular, OSH professionals must understand themselves, their value and values, recognize accountability in action and learn tactics for managing up.

Key Definitions
Influence is the ability to affect other people’s thoughts, behaviors and feelings and consistently move them to action. Consider a position that relies on influence skills to accomplish its goals, both because those who must execute tasks in support of the goals report up through a separate hierarchy, and because the same people are primarily held accountable for the successful completion of tasks that are in direct conflict with this position’s goals.

Few professions match this scenario as perfectly as the OSH profession. For example, a production manager is accountable for output goals that depend on compliance with a strict production schedule. That same manager is accountable for select OSH-related goals. If any of the OSH-related goals appear to conflict with the output goals, then the OSH goals risk being compromised.

Conflict, Compliance & Commitment
To effectively influence people, OSH professionals must first understand the three outcomes of influence: 1) resistance or conflict; 2) compliance; and 3) commitment.

Conflict is created when organizational factors, such as common resources, goal differences and authority relationships combine with personal factors, such as personalities, perceptions and communication barriers.

Consider again the production manager for whom common resources may be an organizational factor. The workers responsible for meeting output goals are also expected to meet OSH goals. However, the production manager does not believe both can be accomplished successfully, and the output goals take precedence. The site’s OSH professional attempts to communicate the importance of safety while achieving output goals, and conflict is born.

The good news is that conflict is normal and it usually means people care. The best way to address conflict is with open, honest communication. Doing so may lead to solutions that involve realistic output and OSH goals that align well with available resources.

The other two outcomes of influence are compliance and commitment, with commitment being the more desirable outcome. People comply to avoid punishment, such as being fired, and may only comply when they are being watched by authority. Unfortunately, compliance often fails short of taking processes to the next level.

Commitment, on the other hand, occurs when people invest in a process. Their actions go beyond what is mandated and they strive to improve the process. Importantly, their actions occur without supervision.

Collaboration
Collaboration is a commitment to work together to resolve issues based on the notion that it is possible to meet individual needs, organizational needs and the needs of others. People collaborate for many reasons, such as:
- when concerns are too important to be compromised;
- when long-term relationships are important;
- to gain commitment by building consensus;
- when others are willing.

Collaboration often requires a mental shift and an openness to alternative solutions. Anyone who thinks the solution to an issue must be “my way or the highway” will not successfully collaborate. The production manager who understands the value of OSH and the OSH manager who understands the importance of producing quality product will have a great foundation for collaboration.

Open-mindedness about how to accomplish both sets of goals will enhance their ability to effectively collaborate.

Managing up is the process of consciously working with your boss to obtain the best possible results for you, your boss and the organization. For example, suppose the production manager and OSH manager have collaborated and identified a solution that involves adjusting output and OSH goals. Without the authority to make such
adjustments, however, they need to manage up.

To best understand how to deal with superiors, OSH professionals should start with a refresher about how to deal with everyone. Remember, bosses are people, too. Here are a few tips to consider:
- Communicate early, often, clearly, concisely and effectively.
- Be sensitive to others’ needs.
- Act with integrity.
- Recognize that the world is not about you, but what you can do for others.
- Work to exceed, rather than simply meet, expectations.
- No one should have a higher expectation of what you are capable of doing than you.
- Display an attitude of gratitude.
- Smile. This reminder is not intended to trivialize the serious matters OSH professionals address in the workplace. Instead, it speaks to a disposition that reduces personal stress and makes others more open to ideas.

**Understanding Yourself, Your Value & Your Values**

How well do you know yourself? Do you effectively correlate who you are with what you seek to accomplish at work and in your career?

Several profile exercises can help individuals assess their unique styles (e.g., Meyers-Briggs, StrengthsFinders). However, a good start is to ask the following questions and consider what your responses mean about who you are and what you value:
- Who am I?
- What is on my plate?
- How much of myself do I bring to work?
- How do I fit into the larger picture?
- Do I allow others to know me and vice versa?
- What do I stand for?

**Accountability in Action**

OSH professionals also must understand what it means to be accountable: This is where personal branding comes into play. An individual’s personal brand is a critical factor in using influence and collaboration to manage up. A personal brand is built on an individual’s standards, values and unique selling (or value) proposition.

**Tactics for Managing Up**

Since the boss is only one component of the relationship, here are some practices and mind-sets to consider:
- You are responsible for your actions in the relationship, and retain direct control over how you behave.
- To facilitate effective work relationships, know your stressors, strengths, weaknesses and personal style.
- Control the areas you can control, and realize that you cannot change anyone except yourself.
- Take actions that make the relationship more effective and productive. Avoid actions such as focusing on yourself, finger pointing, unprofessional actions, not seeking feedback and making minimum effort.
- Once a strong foundation of self-efficacy is built, these practices can enhance efforts to manage up:
  1) Keep the greater good in mind (mission focused).
  2) Know and understand your bosses, and your strengths, weaknesses and stressors.
  3) Be honest, trustworthy and dependable.
  4) Share recognition and be gracious when things do not go your way.
  5) Show commitment, consistency and solidarity.

**Conclusion**

OSH professionals strive to preserve life and protect the environment. Being successful is literally a matter of life and death, and this role cannot be accomplished effectively without managing up.

Besides strengthening influence skills and understanding the benefits of commitment over compliance, managing up involves having a strong understanding of collaboration, how to best deal with people and accountability.

It is also important to keep the greater good in mind. As Nelson Henderson said, “The true meaning of life is to plant seeds under whose shade you do not expect to sit.” Focus on what is important despite the complexity of the challenge (or how long it may take to implement improvements) rather than on serving yourself alone.