

Mistakes to Avoid with Managers

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Day One

If you are a Christian in the working world, working for someone else, I'm sure you know already your manager or employer can have a lot of influence on your success in your job and in your career. It just makes sense you would want to avoid any mistakes in that relationship, if possible, right?

How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver (Proverbs 16:16)!

Wisdom is more valuable than money. Getting wisdom on your job is better than getting a raise! And Proverbs 13:10 says *wisdom is found in those who take advice*. I'm going to share a little wise advice that just might help you avoid some mistakes in dealing with your manager or employer—or the person in authority over you.

Mistake No. 1: Complaining about Your Manager.

I would say it is inevitable you won't like everything your manager does. There is bound to be something in their style or skills you don't agree with, or you feel is ineffective. I can tell you from experience, managers are easy targets for complaining and griping in most organizations.

A man I worked with in my first sales job gave me a good piece of advice, which was: It's your job to get along with your manager, not your manager's job to get along with you. That probably goes against our culture today, but let me tell you, that attitude will work very well for you. I know not all managers are good at their job. I know not all managers are good communicators. And some managers or employers are pretty close to impossible. I know! But as long as you report to that person, you will do yourself a favor to remember it's your job to get along with your manager, not your manager's job to get along with you!

One of the favorite past-times of many employees is to bad-mouth the boss and the company. If you're wise, you will avoid that like the plague. Ecclesiastes 10:20 says:

Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

What wise Solomon is telling us is talking behind the back of someone in authority, saying things you wouldn't say to their face, will almost always backfire on you. Somehow those grumbings make their way back to that person, and they find out what you've said. Some little bird tells them! And that is a mistake you want to avoid.

Day Two

How well do you get along with your boss? I'm sharing some advice to help you get along with whoever is in authority over you. We already noted how important it is not to complain about your boss. Here is mistake number two.

Mistake No. 2: Showing Up Your Boss

It seems some people think they have to show up the boss in order to make a name for themselves, but intentionally trying to outshine your boss is one of the biggest mistakes you can make. The exception to this would be if you discover your boss is corrupt or illegal in some way, which is rare. Otherwise, it is in your best interest to make your boss look good. Think of ways to make their job easier; when you can, go the extra mile to take some workload off them. They can help you or harm you, so be sure to avoid this mistake.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time (1 Peter 5:6).

Making your boss look good may indeed require some humility on your part, where you don't get the credit you think you deserve. But it is one way to humble yourself, and that is a Christian discipline we all need to practice.

Mistake No. 3: Not Understanding Generational Differences

No doubt you have discovered different generations see things very differently! And frequently your manager's generation is not the same as yours. Whether older or younger, you can make some serious mistakes in dealing with your manager if you don't understand and make allowances for these generational differences.

For example, punctuality doesn't seem to be as important to younger generations as it is to us in the older groups. We older types put a high value on being on time for work, for meetings, meeting deadlines, etc. Younger generations seem to be more "laid back," as we say, and have an attitude that if the job gets done, we shouldn't worry about such small things as being on time. Believe me, if your boss thinks punctuality is important, you should make it important.

I have observed people who truly did great harm to their careers simply by being unwilling to conform to reasonable expectations from their boss or company. Remember what I said yesterday—it's your job to get along with your boss not your boss's job to get along with you. That may sound a little strange to you, but for the most part, it is good advice.

Day Three

Have you ever seen someone do great damage to themselves by the way they treated their manager? I'm examining being smart, recognizing managers typically have power to help you or harm you and making sure you avoid some mistakes in dealing with your boss. I've covered three mistakes already: Don't complain about your boss, don't try to show them up, and be willing to make allowances for generational differences. Here's the next mistake:

Mistake No. 4: Displaying Negative Attitudes in Meetings

Now, let me begin by saying negative attitudes are always harmful, but I've noticed a person who seems to always have some negative comments in meetings can really do themselves great harm. Obviously, you should feel free to express your opinions and suggestions, but often it's the way you do it that makes all the difference. Someone told me early in my career if you're going to voice a problem, always follow it with a solution. You don't want to develop a reputation of always being unhappy with what's happening. Even if it just shows on your face, it is not working to your benefit. It is not to your benefit to be put in a "I'm never happy" mold.

Proverbs 17:22 gives us some good advice:

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones (Proverbs 17:22).

Keeping a generally cheerful attitude and demeanor will make you more attractive, more appealing, and someone people want to be with. Think about what kind of attitude you generally portray and make sure

you come across as a person who sees the glass as half full! Your boss will appreciate that very much, I guarantee.

Mistake No. 5: Not Being Able to Handle Feedback

The only way any of us grow is to become aware of areas in our life that need improvement. That means we need feedback from our managers at times, even if it is a bit hard to handle. For sure, none of us enjoys being told we need to improve, but if you develop a reputation that you can't take honest criticism, you will stunt your growth as a person and in your career.

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid (Proverbs 12:1).

Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise (Proverbs 15:31).

Life-giving correction is the perfect terminology for constructive criticism, even if you feel it was not given in a good way. Be willing to hear and then truly consider any criticism that comes your way. Don't make the mistake of not being able to handle feedback.

Day Four

Having held several positions with very different managers, I look back and acknowledge some mistakes I've made in dealing with them. I want to help you in dealing with your manager.

Mistake No. 6: Going Over Your Manager's Head

When I worked in IBM, we had an open-door policy. This simply meant any employee was empowered to go to their boss with any complaint, suggestion, or question, because the door was always open. However, the rule was you go first to your immediate supervisor, and if for some reason that was not satisfactory, then you could go to the next level of management. But if you decided to go over your manager's head and talk first to their manager, you would be immediately advised to first talk to your manager before taking it any further, and it would not be well received if you didn't do it that way.

This open-door policy is a good one, I believe, in keeping communications open and allowing for grievances to be resolved. But first talk to your immediate manager. Don't go over their head. You may feel your manager will not listen and will not do anything about your situation, but until you have tried to resolve it on that level, it will almost always be a mistake to bypass your manager and go to the next level.

Mistake No. 7: Failing to Pay Attention to the "Small Stuff"

Remembering that perception equals reality, if you fail to do the things that create good impressions, you will do harm to yourself and your career. For example, dressing appropriately for your position. I know casual attire is very acceptable in many work environments, but even if that is true where you work, your casual attire needs to be neat, clean, modest, and coordinated. Looking sloppy or careless won't do you any good. Go the extra mile, if necessary, to give the perception that you care how you look and you take time to make a professional appearance.

Take clues from your manager. If he or she dresses very professionally, that tells you they expect and respect that kind of appearance from those who work for them. Someone has said it's smart to dress a level above your position. That might be good advice in some organizations, and it would demonstrate you are serious about moving up in the company.

Day Five

I began this program years ago to encourage and equip Christians to live out their faith on their job. And I've been examining the importance of avoiding certain mistakes many make in getting along with

their boss. I know it's not always easy and I know bosses are not perfect. But I also know you will do yourself a great favor to avoid making some of these mistakes.

I mentioned small things matter, and good manners is another small thing that can make a difference in how your boss sees you. The simple everyday manners of helping others, letting others go first, thanking people, showing kindness to others—those little things create an impression. Failing to pay attention to them can cause self-inflicted harm to you. This verse sums it up perfectly:

For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man (2 Corinthians 8:21).

I've given you seven mistakes to avoid, but since we all make mistakes, here's what to do when you have made a mistake:

- Acknowledge the mistake.
- Take responsibility and offer to fix the problem if it's one you can fix. That may be something as simple as a sincere apology, but your willingness to take responsibility will speak volumes to your manager.
- Move on and do the best possible work you can, avoiding the mistake in the future. Don't wallow in guilt; put it behind you and learn from the experience.
- Don't let the mistake shake your confidence so that you lose your ability to do your work.

Remember, everyone makes mistakes sooner or later. Don't hide behind your mistakes, but don't hide under your desk either. Show your boss it was a fluke and that will never happen again. Then, make it a matter of prayer. If you are a Christ-follower, you have power through prayer and God's Spirit to put mistakes behind you and move forward.