



## Employed Physician's Guide to Managing Your Boss

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**In 2017 we crossed the tipping point.** For the first time in the history of medicine -- [physician practice owners are NOT in the majority](#). Loss of autonomy is a major frustration for many doctors. In fact, being the boss has perhaps become a quaint, old fashioned memory. YIKES.

It is highly likely that even YOU find yourself floating aimlessly in the spaghetti pile of vast bureaucracy - smack in the middle of your org chart with several layers of bosses above you.

These people often have the power to dictate the specifics of your practice ... unless you figure out a way to have some influence over their decisions. And there's the rub. How do you maintain some influence over "the system" when you are not the boss???

In this article let me show you three keys to managing your boss -- if you are an employed physician.

NOTE:

The following action steps assume you have completed the core task of [creating your Ideal Job Description](#) and are preparing to ask for a change in your current practice.

**These are the tools you need to take back some control over your practice.**

**Like it or not, the quality of your relationship with your boss is a huge factor in your quality of life.**

- A good relationship can boost you to a thriving practice.
- A poor relationship can lead to burnout and is one of the top [three reasons employed physicians quit their jobs](#).

**Let's begin ...**

## 3 Keys to Managing Your Boss

### 1) Understand Your Boss X 2

It is vitally important to understand your boss *on two key levels*.

#### a) Know Their Communication and Decision Making Style

Communication:

What is the best way to get through to your boss?

What is their favorite communication channel?

Do they answer your emails or is a text better or are they always open for you to drop in to their office for a quick conversation?

Decision Making:

Is your boss an action oriented person who wants the bullet points, then makes a quick decision -- or a detail oriented, introverted "engineer type" who needs a spreadsheet and two weeks of analysis to come to a conclusion - or something completely different?

**Study their communication and decision making style *very carefully*.**

Pretend you are an anthropologist ... meeting a tribe in the Amazon rain forest for the first time. Carefully observe your boss as a key member of your "tribe". Get to know their basic habits of connection and leadership.



**Prepare to practice the "Platinum Rule".**

You know the old Golden Rule right? "Treat people the way you would like them to treat you."

Just so you know, that rule is often useless for a simple reason. Your boss is not you. They may in fact be a completely different personality than yours. This is why the Platinum Rule is so important. Here it is:

*"Treat people the way THEY want to be treated".*

Do your best to *match their communication style and personality when the two of you are together*. Give them the information and time they want, just the way they want it, through their favorite communication channel -- especially when you are making a request for change to your work structure.

## b) Know Their Goals and Priorities

Your boss almost certainly has a boss of their own. They are in the middle of this bureaucracy too with their own goals and orders from above.

**Do you know what their priorities/goals/objectives are?** The easiest way to find this out is to ask them directly and take good notes. See the question lists below.

It will be much easier for you to get what you need from your boss if your request aligns with one of their own goals. This is the essence of a win:win solution.

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## 2) Understand Yourself X 2

You must understand yourself *on these same two levels.*

a) What is YOUR personality and communication style and how does it differ from theirs?

Notice the way you communicate naturally and how that either matches or conflicts with your boss's personality and style.



**In most cases you will need to modify the way you communicate to connect effectively with your boss.** You don't want to be emailing your boss multiple times a week -- when that communication channel is so flooded with other people's messages, they never see yours.

And when it comes to making decisions, remember you are striving for the "Platinum Rule" here. "Treat people the way they want to be treated". So if your boss likes all the details and time to think and ponder an action step ... give them just what they want ... details and some time.

b) What are YOUR goals and needs?

You have created your [Ideal Job Description](#) ... right? And you are using the [Venn of Happiness process](#) to continuously improve your practice ... right? If that is the case, there will come a time when you need something from your boss to create a more Ideal Practice.

**Winning your boss's support is often the key to making the practice changes you require.**

- Know exactly what you want from your boss
- Do your best to align your needs with one of their goals ... and create that win:win that pleases both of you
- Then ask for what you want

You may need to negotiate back and forth and be willing to accept a bit of a compromise. Do not let that stop you from getting clear on what you want and asking for it.

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### 3) Manage Your Relationship

**Let's face it, you can't actually manage your boss.** You are not in the position in the org chart to hold power over them. You will never be a puppeteer holding their strings.



**What you can manage is the *relationship* between you.**

You must manage the relationship proactively. Think of it this way ...

Your relationship is like a bank account that holds the TRUST between you.

Every positive interaction makes a deposit of good will and Trust into this account. You can draw on this balance of trust you have a request or if there is a conflict or problem.

#### **The Problem:**

In most organizations both the doctors and the bosses are extremely busy. You are seeing patients and your boss is sitting in meetings or putting out fires all day. The first thing that flies out the window in this situation is the two of you sitting down for a cup of coffee. Right?

In most cases if your boss shows up unannounced ... it is because you are in trouble. And if you show up in their office unannounced it is because you are upset enough to walk out of the hospital or office and give them a piece of your mind. Under normal circumstances, doctors and their bosses don't meet unless there is a problem and someone is upset.

It is impossible to build the Trust Account between you if this is the only contact you have with each other. If the only time a physician sees their boss is when there is conflict or a problem, you have no goodwill to draw on. It will drive the two of you even farther apart.

### **The Solution:**

You must schedule regular collegial meetings with your boss to make sure you are *on the same page*. That's right, get together for a cup of coffee regularly when no one is in trouble and you are not angry. You might say to yourself, "Why do we need to meet if there is not a problem?" That physician-specific blind spot is *exactly what denies you the ability to manage your boss going forward*.

To build your Trust account, you must meet regularly – outside of any crisis or problem – to get to know what makes them tick, build your relationship and stay on the same page.

**Regular -- as in once a month or an absolute minimum of once a quarter.**

**You will be the one to schedule these meetings.** Here's why. *Your boss with always be too busy.*

All leaders know they should be rounding on their people by having regular meetings, but if you wait for your boss to schedule with you – the meetings will never happen – *just like they are probably not happening now*. So call them up and get a half hour on their schedule ASAP.

Get to know them and their goals. Get to know their decision making and communication styles in intimate detail. Keep working to make deposits in your relationship Trust account.

Shoot for a ratio of positive 5:1, meaning five positive interactions to every 1 negative or uncomfortable one. This way your balance with your boss will always be in positive territory.

**Down the road - these are also the conversations where you can ask for what you need to keep creating your ideal practice.**

## **Two Power Tips:**

### i) Don't be a Whiner !

The typical physician will point to a problem and ask their boss "what are you going to do about this?" This will destroy your relationship and make you adversaries immediately.

#### **Any time you bring your boss a Problem**

ALWAYS bring a Solution too – any time you bring them a Dilemma, bring a Strategy.

Ideally your request is a win:win that accomplishes two things at once

- It gives you more of what you want
- AND meets one of your boss's objectives at the same time

### ii) Remember the "Continuation Rule"

*A relationship will always continue in the same tone as when you parted*

- **If you end on a positive note**, your next meeting will continue on that same positive trajectory -- even if your discussion is about a problem.
- **If this meeting ends badly**, you will start the next one in the pits as well.

**Do everything you can to avoid ending any meeting in a negative fashion.**

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#### **NOTE:**

This whole task list of "things you do to manage your boss" is *completely different from the work of seeing patients*. These observations, conversations and meetings are in addition to all the work you do in your practice. Often doctors will dismiss this as just so much Office Politics and *brown nosing*. Ignore this skill set at your peril my friend.

Cultivating influence so you can Manage Your Boss also takes time – about six months to get real traction on the Action Plan below.

You are probably shaking your head and thinking, "You mean I have to do all of this in addition to seeing patients and keeping up with the charts?" The answer is "NO" you don't have to do these things. They are not mandatory.

**AND, if you don't take the actions below, you will have no influence over your boss when you need it.** The two of you will be like so many others ... ships passing in the night, only coming into contact when someone – most likely you – is in trouble or something about your practice has frustrated you to the point of complaining about it.

If you are an employed physician, with a boss, who can see down the road the need for the boss's permission to make changes in your practice – I encourage you to take the lists below to heart and get started. If you invest just a couple hours a month in the Action Plan below, you will be pleasantly surprised at the change in your relationship with your immediate supervisor.

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### ACTION PLAN AND QUESTION LISTS:

Here is a complete Action Plan to build influence with your boss going forward. It contains several question sets to guide your thinking and your conversations with your boss.

#### **1) Figure out who your boss is.**

You may need to start here. This may be a challenge in your organization - especially if your structure has changed recently. If you know who your boss is, skip to step #2. If not, make sure you find out who the organization sees as your immediate supervisor.

Is it your CMO, someone in the administration, your practice manager, the Chairperson of your Executive Committee? Figure out who in the organization feels you report to, then do this ...

#### **2) Begin to observe them closely and take notes**

Prepare yourself to begin practicing the Platinum Rule. Over time you must build an intimate understanding of how they communicate and make decisions.

- How do they schedule their days?
- How do they prefer to be communicated with? Email, text, phone, in person.
- When are they at their best – Monday before noon or Friday afternoon or something completely different?

- How to the people who have the best working relationships with your boss relate to this person? What "success factors can you identify and emulate?
- What decisions do they make and when are their actions driven by orders from above?
- Do they tend to make decisions quickly or take their time?
- Do they need detailed information to make a decision ... or just the bullet points?

## 2) Arrange a meeting in the absence of any problems or crisis

Call them up and tell them something like this:

*"I would like to buy you a cup of coffee and get to know your goals for me - and the larger organization - so we are always on the same page. I know you are a very important member of the team here and I would like to see how we can each do a better job of supporting the other and stay on the same page. When can we get together for ... say ... a half hour? I will buy the coffee."*

Let them determine the place and time then prepare your specific question list for the conversation.

## 3) Create your list of questions

Use questions to help you understand what makes them tick.

Notice the example questions below start with "what" or "how" making them open ended. They cannot be answered with a yes or no - so you always get the most information in the time you are together

**Here are some examples:**

- What are your goals for this quarter and this year?
- What role do you see me playing in those goals?
- How else can I help you get there?
- How do you evaluate my performance ... what are the most important numbers for you?
- How am I doing at this time?
- What do you see as ways I can improve?
- What is something you see on the horizon that I can start preparing for now?
- What frustrates you the most around here and how might I be able to help?



Get to know your boss as a person too. You are building an important relationship here. Get to know everything about them.

- Where do they live and do they like it there?
- Do they have a significant other or children?
- What about hobbies and outside interests?

#### **4) Hold the meeting, keep it real and take great notes**

Make sure that your conversation adds to your Trust Account while being real about your concerns when asked. This may be your first collegial interaction ... so *do not ask for any changes in your practice just yet*. This first meeting is to put your Trust account in a positive balance.

Set yourself a goal to increase your knowledge base about their personality, leadership/decision making styles and goals/objectives.

Take great notes, just like you would with a patient. Always be adding to your knowledge base and building your relationship.

#### **5) Schedule your next meeting**

Make a habit of scheduling your next visit with your boss *before this one is done* -- so you always have a relationship building meeting on the books with them before you walk out the door. Quarterly is great. Monthly or every other month is better. Ideally you put the whole year's worth of meetings on your calendars at once before this first one is over.

#### **6) In the Meantime: Get on your Ideal Job Description**

Take the time to get crystal clear on your Ideal Job Description and make a prioritized list of the changes you would like to make in your practice. Hold onto this for later meetings with your boss. [Here is a training](#) on your Ideal Job Description and creating the Venn Diagram that guides this process.

#### **7) Build a Win:Win and ask for it**

Pick the highest priority change you want to make to your practice. Look at it from two perspectives ... BOTH yours and your boss's. Put yourself in their shoes now that you know more about them and their situation.

Create a solution that will be a WIN for BOTH of you. Prepare to present this request at your next scheduled meeting.

Rehearse your presentation ... your significant other is a great person to play your boss by the way. They usually participate with gusto when invited to rehearse with you.

Be flexible and willing to negotiate.

Make sure you have a positive balance in your relationship bank account before you make any requests and that your last encounter with your boss was a positive one.

**THE RESULT:**

When my coaching clients apply these boss management skills, they are often surprised at the **flexibility, support and positive working relationship that results**. In many cases, things you thought were impossible - like going to part time or even getting a scribe - are immediately available when you present a reasonable request to your boss.

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**There you have it, 3 keys to begin managing your boss.**

This article was adapted from the original [Harvard Business Review Article on managing your boss](#) from 1993 by Gabarro and Kotter

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**Next Steps:**

**1) Get the book:** "*Stop Physician Burnout – what to do when working harder isn't working*" [over 32,000 in print]

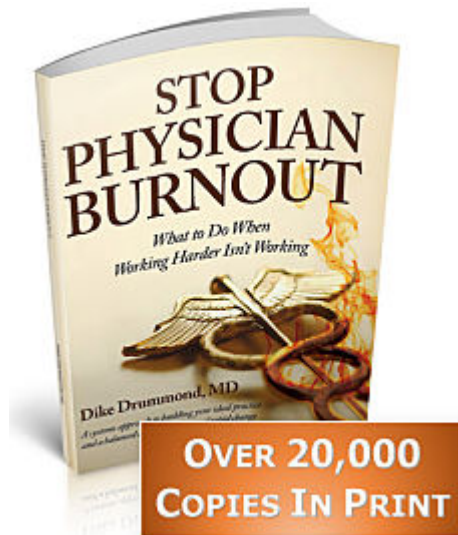
This is the first step-by-step self help guide for physicians/NP's/PA's to prevent burnout for good. It is a complete system to build a more Ideal Practice and a much more Balanced Life.

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**2) Do you need support NOW ?**

Meet our team of Certified Physician Burnout Coaches. Each of them offers a FREE Discovery Phone Consult. This is a full hour, by phone or Skype, to learn much more about your situation and give you an action plan for a way forward.

The call is No Cost, No Obligation, Completely Confidential

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**3) Senior Leaders** – learn the four ways you can hard wire the Quadruple Aim into your organization

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[CLICK HERE to see our retreat schedule or to get us started on a bespoke retreat for your organization](#)

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## THAT'S ALL FOR NOW

We sincerely hope this Manage Your Boss Worksheet will help you achieving some influence over the relationship with your immediate supervisor.

Better yet, we hope it will provide you with tools to help you build *a new relationship with your career* – one where a fulfilling practice and a well-rounded life are both part of the picture.

Please contact us directly [using this website form](#) if you have any questions.

Visit [TheHappyMD.com](http://TheHappyMD.com) for additional resources and tools so you can be a HappyMD

- Stress Management and Burnout Treatment and Prevention
- Physician Wellness Committee Launch and Support Systems
- Physician Leadership Development
- The Quadruple Aim – we are the ones that help you get it done

**Keep breathing and have a great rest of your day,**



*Dike*

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