



# Employed Physician's Guide to Managing Your Boss

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**Here in 2016 - where employed physicians are projected to comprise a full 1/2 of the work force by 2021 - autonomy has become a quaint, old fashioned memory.** As an employed physician, you will quickly realize you no longer sit at your historical position atop the Organizational Chart. These days you have a boss above you. Sometimes this person is not even a physician.

**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.

## 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

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 takes time to make decisions - or something completely different.

**Study them and their communication style very carefully.**

Pretend you are an anthropologist ... carefully observing your boss as a key member of your "tribe".

**Then practice the "Platinum Rule".**

"Treat people how they want to be treated".

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, 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. They have 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 to communicate to connect effectively with your boss.** 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 consider his/her decision ... give them just what they want ... details and some time.

### b) What are your goals and needs?

If you have created your ideal job description and are using the Venn of Happiness process to continuously improve your practice ... you will probably have several requests for your boss.

**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 for that.

**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**

Every positive interaction makes a deposit of good will into this account. You can draw on this balance of goodwill if there is a conflict or problem. 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:**

**Regular collegial meetings with your boss to make sure you are on the same page**

**Regular as in once a month or once a quarter.**

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 bank account. Shoot for a ration 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**

Ideally your solution 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"

Every interaction you have with your boss sets the stage for your next encounter.

- 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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### ACTION STEPS:

#### 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 -- in the day and in the work week?
- 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 would like to be a better team player. 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.*

*When can we get together?"*

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

## 3) Create your list of questions

Use the 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 relationship bank 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 relationship 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

Know what your ideal job is ... 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 getting additional clerical support for your practice - 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

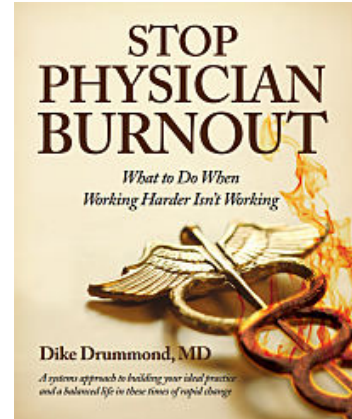
**Next Steps:**

**The Manage Your Boss Worksheet is just one Burnout Prevention Tool. Here are even more options ...**

**1) Buy the book: "*Stop Physician Burnout – what to do when working harder isn't working*"**

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.

[Click Here to learn more and get your copy](#) – including an additional 6 Power Tools at the website.



**2) 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 Leadership Development
- Physician Wellness and Engagement Resources

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**That's all for now. Keep breathing and have a great rest of your day,**



*Dike*

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