

"If I were in charge, I would..."

But you're not, and wishing won't make it so. And if you were in charge, would you be equipped to lead your followers who would be saying, "If I were in charge, I would..."?

Managing up isn't as different from managing down as you may think. You'll adapt some, but the principles work up and down. Replace "bosses" with "your followers" to see that the following practices work both ways:

1. **Be a student of your bosses.** Know what makes them tick (and what ticks them off!) There's no one-size-fits-all solution to dealing with bosses; you need to know them individually. *The more you know about what's important to them, their preferences, work styles, habits, challenges, and goals, the better equipped you are to engage with them productively.* This isn't about sucking up, it's about being influential.
2. **Choose your battles wisely.** Be self-aware enough to know whether you have the credibility to fight any given battle. If it's an important issue and you haven't earned the clout to address it you have several options: 1) enlist others who have credibility in this area; 2) wait to address it while you work on building your own credibility; or 3) break it into smaller pieces and begin influencing the pieces where you can make a difference. Don't spend your energy on battles you can't win. *That may mean being satisfied with small gains without winning the whole battle (at least for now).* The guaranteed ineffective option is to just complain about what you can't change (to the boss or to others).
3. **Bosses are human, too.** They have weaknesses and insecurities just like everyone else. Even the narcissism demonstrated by many strong leaders is a defense mechanism to hide deep-seated insecurities. *Cut them some slack for their imperfections and maybe they'll cut you some slack for yours.*
4. **Be committed to your bosses' success.** Yes, they're flawed, but chances are they get some things right. Even the incompetent drunk I once worked for had a few redeeming qualities. Reinforce and encourage the positives. *Your best chance at ever being able to speak into their weaknesses comes once they know you're committed to seeing them succeed.* And remember that your own integrity is indicated by whether you treat them the same behind their back as you do to their face.
5. **Get over yourself.** If your biggest needs are to vent your emotions, be heard, and be right, just recognize these as self-centered and know they won't increase your value or influence. If your goal is for all of you to succeed together then let every word be driven by that motivation and not your personal emotional satisfaction. That may mean suppressing some of your own thoughts, emotions, and great ideas until the receptivity is right. *Only say what's helpful for moving toward your goal.*



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