



Collaboration With Your Boss: Strategic Skills for Professional Nurses

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During your nursing career, you will have many bosses with varying leadership styles and interpersonal skills. Despite the disparity of personalities, the collaborative relationship you have with your supervisor can be significant and the effects long-lasting. Working well with your boss requires a concerted effort to obtain the knowledge and skills forming the foundation of a mutually beneficial relationship.

There is important evidence describing the benefits of a good boss-employee relationship. In May 2006, *The Journal of Nursing Management* published a longitudinal study of the causes of job satisfaction in the nursing profession. It stated support from a supervisor as one of the strongest predictors of job contentment for any professional nurse.

Conversely, a poor relationship between a nurse and supervisor can have myriad negative professional and physical consequences. Nadia Wager, a psychologist at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College in England, documented the physical effects of nurses's ambulatory blood pressure of working under favorably and unfavorably perceived supervisors. Nurses who perceived lack of respect, fairness or sensitivity in their supervisors had dramatically higher blood pressure throughout the day than nurses working for bosses who were judged as considerate and empathetic. The 2003 study, published in *Occupation and Environmental Medicine*, concluded that an unfavorably perceived supervisor is a potent workplace stressor, which might have a clinically significant impact on a nurse's long- and short-term cardiovascular functioning.

Because of the consequences to your physical and professional well-being, improving the collaboration between you and your boss is important. Developing a strategy to promote this mutually beneficial relationship is a valuable tool to becoming a self-advocate in your professional career.

Skill #1. Understanding your boss's role

The first skill in promoting a positive relationship with your supervisor is to understand what your boss's role consists of. Learning her job requirements, priorities and goals can lay the groundwork for understanding her constraints and help you understand what exactly she needs from you to move toward meeting those priorities. Knowledge of the scope of her responsibility, her background in the company and career goals will give you valuable insight into what she needs from you. By observing and asking questions, you can learn a lot about your boss's world.

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Skill #2. Viewing your boss as a client

Nurses naturally value the relationships they have with patients and hospital clients. As a result, they often will extend themselves greatly to meet the varying and diverse needs of their patients, families and nursing students.

Katherine Spencer Lee, an executive consultant at RHI Consulting, talks about the advantages of viewing your boss as a client. “You probably already go out of your way to accommodate clients or customers.” So why not think of your boss as you would a patient or a nursing student? Keep in mind that your relationship with your boss is one of the most essential relationships for your job satisfaction, and meeting the boss’s expectations is also important.

Skill #3. Communicating effectively

Bosses differ in their preferred communication style. Some managers like e-mail while others want face-to-face contact. It behooves you to ascertain how much information and when a boss wants communication. Does she desire updates on projects, or is “no news is good news” her preferred approach to communication? It is necessary to perfect the art of communicating with your boss, for how you interact with her has a major impact on your performance appraisal and consequently your career.

Skill #4. Letting your boss know what you need

After learning the art of communicating with a boss, be proactive in letting her know what you need to do your job more effectively. Don’t assume that your boss is aware — remember she has a multitude of other issues she is juggling. Be it a class or a piece of equipment, bosses need to know how to provide you with the tools and resources necessary for your job.

Skill #5. Dealing with the difficult boss

Similar to patients, every manager brings with her different personalities, backgrounds and challenges. Nurses are adept at dealing with difficult patients’s differences, but are less inclined to use the same skills when dealing with a challenging boss. Some common, but unhelpful, ways that some nurses deal with difficult bosses include avoiding interaction, increased absenteeism or quitting.

Building a better relationship with your boss means first taking into account her communication style and personality and tailoring your strategies accordingly. For example:

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- **Different working styles** — You may like to be left alone to do your job, but your boss may believe that good management means close supervision. Openly communicating with her your preferred working style enhances collaboration.
- **Peer advice** — If you have a colleague who gets along well with the boss, ask her for suggestions.
- **Don’t take it personally** — Everyone is entitled to a bad day or a less than perfect comment. Don’t take individual moments personally.
- **Adapt your communication style** — Take the time to listen to your boss. If she says something you agree with, say so.

Skill #6. Knowing when to seek advice

Despite all of your best efforts, some boss-employee relationships require outside assistance. Before quitting or making a potentially detrimental career move, seek the advice of a professional, such as the human resource specialist.

Aggressive and abusive behavior should never be tolerated and should be reported to your boss’ supervisor immediately.

Conclusion

Forming a harmonious and productive relationship with your supervisor can have outstanding benefits for your personal life and your professional career. Like any skill, learning to adapt so you can nurture this type of relationship takes practice, but the rewards will be abundant.



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