

Nurse's Guide to Managing Your Boss

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Here in 2016 – when burnout rates in nurses can be as high as one in three – it doesn't take long to realize **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 career.
- A poor relationship can lead to burnout and is one of the top three reasons nurses quit their career and move on.

Just think back to your own experience. Have you ever had a pretty good career and quit it because of a pretty bad boss? Almost everyone has experienced that frustrating situation.

Wouldn't it be powerful to know some simple tools that allow you to actually manage your boss? With the techniques in this report you can do just that. You can work a plan to build trust and connection with your immediate supervisor, so when you need something from them to build your Ideal Career, you can ask for it with confidence.

Setting the Stage

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

Learn THEIR Personality, Communication and Decision Making Styles

Watch what they do - and how they do it - in fine detail. It is almost like being a secret agent on behalf of your Ideal Career Description.

Personality:

What kind of a person is your boss? Are they introverted and quiet or extraverted and love to lead the meeting? Are they a person you give a hug to or will a brief handshake suffice?

Communication style:

How do they prefer to communicate? Short sharp e-mails, long phone messages, face-to-face over coffee? What is their favorite communication channel – email, text, phone message? Watch for the easiest way to get their attention and whether they like short message or all the details.



Decision making style:

What information do they need to make a decision and how do they want that information served up? 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 all the details in a spreadsheet and two weeks to make sure everything is in place.

Study them very carefully.

Pretend you are an anthropologist ... carefully observing your boss as a key member of your "tribe". Take notes. Notice what makes them smile, what communication channels get their attention quickly and how much information and time they need to make a decision.

Prepare to Practice the "Platinum Rule"

You remember the Golden Rule, right? "Treat people how YOU would like to be treated." You are not your boss. You may actually be the opposite of your boss in personality. In that case, the Golden Rule won't just be ineffective, it may be downright irritating to your boss.

Here's 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.

Understand THEIR Goals and Priorities

Your boss almost certainly has a boss. They are receiving 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. The only way to craft that win: win is to know their goals first.

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Understand YOUR Personality, Communication and Decision Making Styles

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

Personality:

What kind of a person are you? Introverted, quiet, neat and detail oriented or outgoing, verbal, first to speak up in a meeting and prefer hugs to handshakes? Notice the way your personality style matches or clashes with your boss.



Communication style:

Notice the way you communicate naturally – short and sweet or all the details, voice messages or text, in person with a cup of coffee or by email. Notice how your key communication channels and styles either match or conflict with your boss's style.

Decision making style:

Notice what you need to make a decision – just a couple bullets and 30 seconds to think about it or the full spreadsheet and 10 days. Notice how this style matches or conflicts with your immediate supervisor.

In most cases you will need to modify the way you 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.

Understand Your Goals and Priorities

If you are clear on your Ideal Career Description and using your Master Plan to make some changes at work, sooner or later you will need something from your boss.

Winning your boss's support will eventually become important to making the career 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 in a way that matches their communication and decision making style – make a Platinum Rule Request

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.

Now You Are Prepared to 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 the two of 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 nurse 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 -- once a quarter at a bare minimum.



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 ratio of 5:1 positive -- meaning 5 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 will ask for what you need to create a more ideal career.

Two Power Tips:

1) **Don't be a whiner!**

The typical nurse 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 goals at the same time

2) 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, 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 do 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 going forward."

I know you are a very important member of the team here and I would like to see how we can do a better job of supporting each 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 career 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 Career Description

Know your Ideal Career Description. Make your Master Plan of the changes you would like to make in this job so it matches your Ideal Career Description more closely. You learned this process in [Stop Nurse Burnout](#).

7) Set Yourself Up for Success

Pick the highest priority change you want to make to your career. 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 conversation** ... 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.
- 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.

8) Ask for What You Need

Present your request, knowing you have set the stage for a "yes". Be flexible and willing to negotiate. Don't be surprised if you get what you want without any kerfuffle at all.

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 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 Nurse Burnout – What to Do When Working Harder Isn't Working*"

This is the first step-by-step self help guide for nurses to prevent burnout for good. It is a complete system to build a more Ideal career 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 StopNurseBurnout.com for additional resources and tools to lower stress, build more life balance and a more Ideal Career

- Stress Management and Burnout Treatment and Prevention
- Nurse Leadership Development
- Nurse Wellness and Engagement Resources

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



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