



THE ART OF
MANAGING UP
ADDING VALUE FROM ALL LEVELS

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Emerging Leaders Committee

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THE ART OF MANAGING UP

What exactly is “managing up?” **Managing up** is the nuanced approach to consciously adding even greater value to your team and clients by finding efficiencies and communication tactics that benefit your specific group of colleagues and stakeholders.

When you start your career, you may not understand the notion of “managing up.” While it may initially be a bit abstract to wrap your head around, you will get into the groove of anticipating needs and communicating more effectively. Ultimately this will benefit your manager, colleagues, clients and career development.

It may be challenging to think beyond your tactical work and role on a team or in a department, but by activating your “managing up” muscles and practicing the related habits, you can better do your job and advance your team’s priorities (while often positioning yourself for career advancement.)

This guide provides context and tactical advice on how to build your managing up skills as a young to mid-level professional - while you navigate different people dynamics, work paces, priorities and key initiatives.





MANAGING UP

WHILE DRIVING YOUR CAREER GROWTH

As you take on more responsibility in your career, managing up can help position you as an emerging leader and essential team player. By serving your accounts or teams from both a tactical execution role and someone who can keep the momentum building, you will add value and stand out as someone capable of more advanced work. Anticipating needs, flexing to others' strengths, work tendencies and being confident in your skills will benefit your team and career.

WHAT DOES MANAGING UP LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

While there are no hard and fast rules on what constitutes "good" managing up, it can look like:

- Proactively sharing your upcoming priorities, deliverables and deadlines on a Friday afternoon with your manager/team leads. Doing so will help them understand what is on your radar and whether they should add additional items or opportunities to your workload while maximizing and protecting your time where they can.
- Propose a breakdown of team roles related to a initiative so people have clarity and can discuss/adjust accordingly.
- Keeping an organized paper trail to help track progress on email threads to avoid confusion. Tools like 'conversation thread' mode in Microsoft Outlook can be helpful.
- Ask questions early. Rather than fully diving into a tactic hoping you are on the right track, take a minute to gut-check and clear up questions to prevent stress, heightened emotions or client/stakeholder issues when the deadline approaches.
- Checking the status of a job before the deadline is a way to remind the team of the timing and get a pulse check on whether additional help is needed to keep things moving.
- Share deliverables with your manager or teammate for review one to three days before it is due to the client or stakeholder. Be mindful that they may have higher priorities while allowing for ample time for edits and revisions. Consider using calendar holds to book time for reviews or as reminders of important deadlines.
- When sharing a deliverable for review, attach relevant email correspondence or documents that contain related context to help refresh the reviewer on the purpose/scope of the work.

MANAGING UP ALSO PLAYS A ROLE IN YOUR CAREER.

When it comes to your growth and development, a few ways to manage up to continue learning and sharpening skills include:

- Ask for regular feedback. Work with your manager to ask peers and leaders related to your client or key line(s) of business for regular feedback on what is going well and where you have room to grow. Showing your willingness to learn and assess where you can work on skill-building can go a long way to your teammates and decision-makers.
- When receiving feedback, benchmarking growth and examples of how you have improved can make a difference when discussing a promotion.
- Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) with your manager is another great way to track progress. Whether client-based, task-based, or return on investment (ROI) on content, finding ways to show your value over time will help you build the foundation of your career.



ANTICIPATING NEEDS THROUGHOUT YOUR WORK PROCESS



UNDERSTAND THE FULL CONTEXT OF THE TEAM, EFFORT, WORK STYLES AND TIMING

Managing up is a wide-ranging practice of fully understanding the different moving parts at work. These could include a teammate who may be spread thin, has trouble sticking to deadlines or a client who needs more or less hand-holding than others for example. Because of this, more junior team members can help keep the focus on the bigger picture.

EVALUATE THE DIFFERENT PEOPLE AND DYNAMICS AT PLAY – AND HOW YOU FIT INTO THEM. CONSIDER:

- What the task, initiative or goal at hand is.
- What pressures are there while tracking tasks, initiatives or goals? (Is there a benchmark that needs reaching? Is there any stress from stakeholders? Is this something new the team is trying? Is this routine business as usual?)
- What are your colleagues' strengths and weaknesses? What are yours? How can you flex to help amplify others' strengths and mitigate challenges or blind spots within your role? (i.e., providing an outline for a longer-form document if a teammate has a media relations strength but weaker writing skills.)
- Try to gauge how the team works together. Are brainstorming sessions, routine meetings or video calls beneficial? Is assigning roles and sharing Word documents a better way to tag-team tasks? As you work through deliverables and assignments, present them in the most effective method for the team, not just what is convenient for you.
- Draw a process map for any project or task to visually represent how each team member interacts with a given decision or deliverable. Identify opportunities where you can take on additional responsibilities or facilitate hand-offs.

ADD VALUE TO THE TEAM BY EMBRACING YOUR SELF-DEVELOPMENT ALONG THE WAY WITH THESE FOUR MINDFUL APPROACHES:

☑ **Be reliable.** When people know you deliver on what you promise, with consistent work quality, the team can build on this foundation. By being communicative about your working hours (especially in a remote or hybrid environment), availability, deadlines and delivering quality work on time, you build a reputation of being reliable and someone worth growth opportunities.

☑ **Be open to feedback.** Receiving constructive criticism is not always the most enjoyable experience. It is critical, however, especially in the early years of your career. Being open to feedback and finding ways to enhance your approach to managing work can remove emotion from more challenging conversations and help focus on gradual growth with high impact and work quality.

☑ **Be proactive.** Being mindful and finding a balance in your workload is major. However, a self-starter who demonstrates leadership and willingness to support the team can help you stand out and manage up. It can be tough on team members if they feel you wait for a new task versus finishing one and suggesting the team begins on the next. Being proactive can also help guide the team, ensuring movement toward the outcome each step of the way.

☑ **Be upfront about working styles.** Understand how you work best in addition to the working styles and approaches of those with whom you work or report. Talking about preferred communication/collaboration methods can remove potential barriers due to different working styles.



FLEXING YOUR STRENGTHS:

HOW MANAGING UP EMPOWERS OTHERS TO FLEX THEIRS

People often assume that managing up implies one's manager or team lead is not a good leader or capable of keeping the team moving. However, managing up is a way to focus on your strengths and help enable others to lean into their own, ultimately benefiting the team. If everyone is anticipating needs, thinking ahead, being proactive and developing consistent work quality, the team will be in the best position to thrive.

LEARN FROM OTHERS.

» Whether you are in-house, in an agency or consulting, as you gauge dynamics and learn more about your colleagues, learn from those you feel do a good job managing up and work well with peers. Building informal mentoring relationships can help you define your role, ask questions about growth and learn how the organization approaches things like client management, promotions, etc. Learning tips and tricks from teammates is always a good way to build relationships and hone your skills.

DON'T INVOLVE YOURSELF IN OFFICE POLITICS.

» Managing up can help form more cohesive teams. As you build more internal relationships and gain new responsibilities, try not to engage in "watercooler" talk or instant messages that often start innocently and may turn toxic or unnecessary. Stay focused on adding value and keeping initiatives on track, sharing feedback as it makes sense; do not let a "venting session" or gossipy discussion distract and detract from the work.

GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

» Being confident in your abilities and the value you add to the organization and your team(s) is of the utmost importance as you build your career. While imposter syndrome is pervasive for many young professionals as they adapt to the post-graduate or workplace environment, it can detract from the efforts and benefits you bring to the team. As you think about your goals and strengths in managing up, consider setting reasonable benchmarks for yourself to help you visibly see your growth and accomplishments over time; this will further enable you to steer the team across levels. Do not be shy when sharing these goals with your managers to hold you accountable. They can also spot any opportunities to cultivate your skills that you may not realize.



QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

AS YOU CONSIDER YOUR APPROACH TO MANAGING UP:

AS A PROFESSIONAL:

What are my strengths as a leader?

What are my strengths as a teammate?

What are my strengths on this account or project tactically?

How do I react or manage emotions?

How can I work to be a consistent contributor to the team?

AS A TEAM:

What are my manager's and teammates' strengths?

How does my manager react or manage emotions? How can I be mindful in anticipating his/her/their tendencies

How can my manager, team and I manage expectations and share feedback most effectively?

How can I best consider context and anticipate needs to streamline my work and help drive the team's goals forward?

What are the most common roadblocks or challenges that impede our team's ability to deliver, and what possible solutions might address these?

Where is there room to create a process or efficiency across the team?

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