



# How Do You Manage Up?

Managing up is a critical skill, but it's not one you can ask your boss about. We asked Fellows to submit their best advice on navigating your relationship with your superior(s).

- **Learn about your manager's goals and the expectations that are set for them.** It will help you understand what they are trying to achieve, how you can help them, and allow you to become a partner in each other's success.
- **Ask more questions.** Speaking up and asking questions helps establish a brand of intellectual curiosity and trust because your managers understand you're invested in truly understanding your work, and thus will likely be more receptive when you manage up.
- **Figure out your manager's communication preferences.** For project updates, does your manager prefer long emails or only a few bullet points? If they prefer in-person conversations, would they rather you schedule something, or is stopping by OK? If they're on the road a lot, ask whether they prefer emails or texts for urgent questions. You will be more effective if you're communicating in the way that resonates best for your manager. And, if you're unsure what information to share, try asking yourself, "If I were in their position, would I want or expect to know this information? Would it be important to me?"
- **Be aware of your manager's time constraints.** For example, a manager who travels 80% of the time will typically have a style and timeline of response that is dramatically different from someone who is mostly working locally. With the first type of manager, sending lengthy emails and bulky attachments may lead to a delayed response, so concise emails/phone calls may be more effective.
- **Let your manager know about your successes.** Your manager may only know about your wins (small and large) if you keep them updated, both in real time and when it's time for your regular review(s). A client has sent you an email complimenting the work you did? Forward it to your manager. It may not be intuitive to toot your own horn, but often nobody else will, and you should be recognized for your accomplishments!
- **Find ways to get the attention you need.** Assume senior partners receive 500-1,000+ emails a day. If something is urgent, consider putting their name in the subject line in all caps ("Question for JOHN: deposing treater expert on Monday"). If something is *really* urgent, I suggest texting the partner if they are out of the office, or find a liaison (like a junior partner) who is more comfortable doing so.

- **Understand your organization’s corporate structure.** That includes the ranks of seniority leading to the management roles (think org chart) and an understanding of the company’s goals for advancement (i.e. partner track and requirements for same; if in-house, how to get to more senior ranks/titles).
- **Regularly ask for feedback from superiors.** Consider requesting a monthly check-in to establish how you can best succeed and advance.
- **Think about ways you can make yourself invaluable to your organization.** For example, if you’re at a firm, you should tailor your work to specific partners in the field(s) in which you seek to gain expertise, as well as those fields in which you have a path for opportunity and advancement. Position yourself as an expert by going to client meetings, taking on speaking engagements, and writing articles.
- **Look for ways to be proactive.** Volunteer to do weekly case reports, offer to draft articles for partner review and co-authoring credit, or just stop by and ask if there’s anything else you can do to help. You can also ask more senior associates or junior partners for tips on how to be helpful to specific partners.
- **Send a status report.** Providing timely responses is often *late* for partner purposes. Getting an email a week *before* the deadline with an update on the status (or better yet, the draft to review) is an enormous help for the partner, and makes you look proactive and invested.
- **Approach your leaders with a point-of-view when discussing an issue or challenge, and offer a recommendation.** As lawyers, we’re regularly confronted with difficult, nuanced situations and forced to make recommendations for our clients. The same is true for leaders. When you bring a recommendation to a superior, it not only makes life easier for them, it also highlights your own leadership and problem-solving skills.
- **Establish reasonable boundaries.** Partners can’t read your mind. Block off your calendar (“VACATION—PLEASE DO NOT SCHEDULE”) or communicate in advance of your deadlines (“I have X, Y, Z on my plate next week,” or, “I’m out of the office next month”).
- **Make your manager’s life easier.** Help them to be, and to appear, prepared. For example, when my manager and I have a call with clients or business partners, I try to email him in advance with talking points or a short agenda. I feel that preparation is part of why he usually lets me lead those calls.
- **Be courageous.** Leaders make difficult and, occasionally, unpopular decisions—often in consultation with trusted advisors. When you’re given the opportunity to share your perspective, do it—thoughtfully and respectfully, of course! It won’t be easy at first, but it helps build your relationship with your leaders, as it shows courage, candor, and the ability to be vulnerable—all of which are critical leadership skills.

- **Find a sponsor.** A sponsor is a senior in your organization who has power to influence decision-making. A sponsor believes in your potential, has a voice at the decision-making table, and provides cover so you can take risks to succeed. And remember—it's not just about what you get. You have to create loyalty with your sponsor, too.
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2019 Fellow **Divya Gupta** is a Partner at Dorsey & Whitney LLP, where she leads one of the nation's few highly specialized commercial and financial services litigation teams focused on the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other federal statutes.



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