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9 ways to get into your boss' good books

How to endear yourself properly to your employer

by **Celine Tan**

It's not about kissing up to your boss or having an office affair but being in your boss' good books or possibly being a favourite of his may be a smart career move. You might be able to move vertically and have a "happier life" in the organisation.

"If your boss loves you, he will remember you when rewards, incentives and promotions are available in the organisation," says Khim Goh, country manager for Recruit Express Sdn Bhd.

"Establishing a strong, conducive and mutually-beneficial working relationship can put you in the boss' 'internal circle' and this can strengthen communication as well as get things moving easily," says Kevin Tan, principal consultant for Omni View Consultancy (M) Sdn Bhd.

Your bosses will also tend to be more patient and forgiving with the mistakes you may make, says Goh.

Here are 9 tips to get into your boss' good books:

1 Make your boss look good

It is very important that you say and do good things for the boss or organisation. "It is not about telling your boss: 'Hey boss, you are very good' because bosses practically know they are good, if not they wouldn't be your boss," says Ernie Chen, founder and group CEO of ATCEN International Group. "Instead, doing a good job in every single task given to you will make your boss look good. For instance, when you deliver promises to your company's clients, the clients will in turn tell your boss that he has given you the right guidance. It makes your boss feel good."

Tan says you can make your boss look good by showing that you care for the company, giving your commitment, and delivering tangible, sustainable and positive results to the company and your co-workers.

2 Understand your boss

Empathise with your boss. "Renowned writer and speaker Stephen Covey has explained the importance of the habit of 'seek first to understand, then to be understood' in his book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. By understanding your boss, you will be at least two steps ahead of him and able to anticipate his reactions, thus putting yourself in a better position to respond," says Tan.

In *The Truth About Managing Your Career ...and Nothing But the Truth*, Dr Karen Otazo says honouring your boss is about going out of your way to find what works for him, rather than expecting him to figure out how to work with you. Goh suggest that you understand his work style. "For instance, find out how

your boss will react when you make a mistake. Does your boss prefer to solve the problem first or sit down with you to discuss the matter? This enables you to work more effectively with him and provides a foundation for better rapport."

3 Understand your boss' expectations and do more than is expected of you

Having a clear understanding of your duties and responsibilities is considered a top priority in the workplace. "It is important to learn what your boss' expectations are," says Tan, who thinks that once you are able to understand them, you are working from a position of strength. "This means that, at the very least, you are meeting some criteria that your boss will be using when he is evaluating your job performance."

Delivering more than expected can impress your boss. "If you are merely doing what is expected, you can't be expecting extra bonuses. You are paid to do what is expected," says Chen. "But, if you are able to impress your boss periodically by delivering more than is expected and make your boss excited about what you are doing, he will certainly reward you accordingly." Otazo notes that if you can subtly effect a change for the better, your boss will notice the improvement and think more highly of you. "And in a large organisation, an appreciative boss is the conduit for news of your talent and success to travel up the hierarchy."

An alternative way to impress your boss is to take on more responsibility. "But, you have to ensure that you are competent and be responsible when taking more of these tasks," says Chen. In *101 Ways to Stand Out at Work*, Arthur D Rosenberg wrote that whether

WHAT DOES NOT WORK

BOSSES are not easily deceived by some "good" things that employees do. Here are some moves that might not work:

>> Trying to look productive but nothing is happening. "Undeniably, the impact of social media in the workplace is growing. If you spend most of your time on these social-interaction websites, have to stay back to complete your job and complain about workload, then it is an attitude problem. This will reflect badly on you," says Khim Goh, country manager for Recruit Express Sdn Bhd.

>> Making your boss look good in the wrong way. "Sometimes, it is nice to tell your boss 'you look good'. But, don't talk behind his back after that," says Goh.

Ernie Chen, founder and group CEO of ATCEN International Group, says one should never talk badly about the boss or the organisation. "It will get around and come back to you. At the end of the day, you might lose your job."

>> Tripod-ding and apple-polishing can get you to where you want to be, but beware. "Bosses [who aren't owners of the business] will want people who 'prop them up' to be around as it makes life easier for them. But it will not last when the business goes downhill and his job is at stake. He has to find a 'scapegoat'. The nearest one would be the brown-noser," says Kevin Tan, principal consultant for Omni View Consultancy (M) Sdn Bhd.

>> Working independently of your boss. "This means you work independently and do not care about what your boss says," says Goh. By doing so, says Chen, it will result in a misalignment of your direction and that of the organisation's.

Being overly independent and seen to be running your own show can also send out the wrong message. "This is especially so in a very bureaucratic organisation. This kind of over-initiative can be misconstrued as 'the staff is competent and the boss is less competent or incompetent'. The boss' inferior thinking will start to stifle your initiative and motivation and over time, 'kill' your innovation," says Tan. ■

it's your normal work or something for which you've volunteered, always do it as well as you are able. "If your work comes to be known as minimal and shoddy, you won't often be entrusted with important tasks. After all, your boss is also judged by the quality of your work, and the most critical and visible assignments will be handed to the best workers." He also says that setting and meeting deadlines build credibility while missed milestones reflect negatively on you and your agenda. "So, be sure that you are able to meet your commitments before agreeing to them."

4 Provide solutions rather than problems

Rosenberg notes that whatever your line of work, chances are your boss is looking for solutions to a variety of problems. "Helping to resolve some of these problems makes you an asset; the more solutions you provide, the greater your value." He adds that managers and supervisors are always seeking people to whom they can turn to for perspective and assistance. "The more you can get them [the managers and supervisors] to rely on you, the better your position to assume added responsibility and privilege."

Bosses do get overwhelmed with problems, says Goh, and if you are able to provide solutions, it really endears you to yours. "Bosses will appreciate you more and are more interested in developing and promoting you as you are able to show leadership and ownership skills."

Naturally, everyone is good at pointing out problems and only a few have solutions. "But, it's not enough to identify solutions, it's equally, if not more important, to implement and execute the solutions and get real results quickly once you have secured your boss' consent," says Tan. "To the boss, he is only measuring your capability when he sees the solutions in real terms, which is a sustainable idea that solves the problem. Remember that solutions that matter to the bosses are those that are able to solve problems and not create new ones."

5 Working independently on the job

Bosses love employees who are able to work independently on the job. Says Goh, "This gives your boss fewer headaches in managing you."

An employee who works independently will also realise that there will be time to "get dependent". It is about keeping your boss in the loop. For instance, if you encounter issues along the way, the right thing to do is to report back to the boss with solutions. "You have to be dependent or collaborative when you need to. Keep your boss informed along the way. Short notes and updates are absolutely critical even if it does not need any answer or reply from the boss. It's just showing him that you are keeping him in mind all the time," says Tan.

6 Make your time count

Bosses seldom measure their employees based on the number of

hours worked, say human resource consultants. To bosses, says Goh, what matters is the productivity and efficiency level of the employees.

Time wastage is a liability to bosses. "Bosses love employees who manage to see 'time at work is money'. If you think you work hard, work harder. The ultimate result that the bosses want to see is work delivery," says Chen.

However, spending more time at work matters to newcomers. "When you just start out, you need to work hard and smart. You need to learn how to do the job, even if it means staying back to complete tasks. By staying back and being committed to finishing what you have to do for the day, you are giving your boss a good impression of you," says Goh. Chen adds that bosses usually have issues if you still don't produce results even if you work long hours, but they are more tolerant since they see you trying to deliver results.

7 Communicate with your boss

Communication may be a two-way process, but one party can do much to alter the dynamics. It is in your best interest to take the lead, strategically but subtly, in communicating with your boss. "A lot of employees are very good at what they do. But, the problem is that they don't express themselves well. Sometimes, these employees say, 'how come I am doing so much, but my boss doesn't seem to understand?'" says Chen. "Remember that bosses are not mind readers. Bosses can be caught up with work and managing a number of subordinates; but they certainly want to hear from their subordinates — regardless of the nature of the matter, negative or positive."

"Bosses want to understand their people as well. You need to express

your ideas and issues so that they can understand you. It's about forging ties based on mutual respect and understanding," says Goh.

In *On the Move: Communication for Employees*, Ron Blicq suggests that to put forward an organised, concise idea that will be easily heard by the boss, you can make the suggestion, give your reasons, explain what will be gained and what will be lost if your suggestion is adopted and be prepared to answer questions the boss might have.

8 Watch your code of conduct

Bosses appreciate employees who behave well. Otazo says displays of manners and respect show that you are capable of assuming a higher-level position and moving ahead in your company. Whatever you think about your boss, the trick is to always behave respectfully and look for ways to make him or her feel good about your relationship, she says.

Behave professionally. "The way you conduct yourself at work and having the 'highest' ethical standard can garner admiration from your boss," says Goh. "Avoid behaviours that can affect your boss' and your professional reputations."

9 Showing positivism in your life and work

No bosses like grumpy staff around. "If you are a positive person, you will naturally react to your profession positively and you will be working for your organisation positively," says Chen. "Bosses love positive employees not only because they come to work in an upbeat manner but also because the positive attitude can rub off on one's colleagues and bosses. Such a work environment may boost motivation and results." ■