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Managing Newsroomcan be a Piece of Cake

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MASTERING THE ART
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Managing newsroom can be a piece of cake

You may never desire to be a manager, but you still have to manage. Your perspective changes depending on where you sit in the

organizational chart. If you're in the lower part of the organizational chart, you may think you have to manage only yourself. If you're in the middle of the chart, you know the tug of war of managing down, across and up. If you're at the top, you know the challenge of managing down.

In truth, wherever you are in the chart, managing yourself, peers and the boss is required.

Managing yourself

Self-management is only one part of the equation. Taking care of your own responsibilities — juggling assignments, priorities and daily deadlines — can be a handful. After working in a newsroom long enough, you soon learn that success requires more than showing up for work and working hard. Consistency, impact and communication are the keys to managing yourself well.

• **Consistency:** You have to be a consistent performer, one who can be counted on to do a solid job no matter the assignment and with a smile. Create a “walk-the-talk” plan for your job. Record the tasks you have to do regularly and also the attitude you must have to perform solidly all the time. Post this list where you can revisit it often so you can make sure you're on track.

• **Big impact:** Spend your prime time on the tasks that will have the greatest impact, but don't let the little things slip through the cracks. The small tasks, the things you may think are beneath you, can be just as important in the long run. For managers, focusing on people and planning will have the greatest impact.

• **Communication:** You have to be a clear communicator, sharing information and listening carefully. Communication is a two-way street.

Managing peers

Managing peers might be a little more challenging. After all, you can't make them do what you want. Here, you must master the art of persuasion and the ability to articulate mutual benefits. Keep in mind these things when working with peers:

• **Customer needs:** Focusing on the ultimate goals of the organization and the needs of the reader/viewer/listener are particularly useful in getting things done. If you operate with peers on that basis, you'll find it easier to work with others.

• **Departmental needs:** Understand and meet the needs of other departments. For

example, involving the visual team early in the process will make you shine in their eyes. Other departments are also more likely to help you in a pinch if you've been mindful of their needs along the way.

• **Communication:** Here too, you have to be a clear communicator, sharing information and listening carefully.

Managing bosses

For some, managing yourself or even your peers might seem like a piece of cake. But for many, managing the boss might feel like trying to devour a 10-tier wedding cake with a toothpick as your only eating utensil. And yet, managing the boss is perhaps our most important task.

Where and how do you begin to tackle a 10-tier cake? Start at the top and take one piece at a time — carefully.

• **Learn his/her priorities and then focus on them:** Each boss was hired for a specific purpose. With that purpose in mind, your boss — hopefully — has established priorities. Find out what those priorities are and align yourself with the boss's goals for the organization.

• **Inform him/her of problems:** Bosses want to know about problems, but they also want to know your suggested solutions. If

your boss is the problem, and he or she wants your feedback on his or her performance, be careful. You might ask the boss questions: What are you most concerned about? What do you want to accomplish? How do you want to be perceived? Do you really want my honest opinion? Focus on the boss's concerns and goals, not the person.

• **Let him/her know what you're doing:** Newsroom management consultant Edward Miller says your boss knows only a portion of what you do. He suggests using a tool called the 15-5, a monthly memo to your boss that takes 15 minutes for you to write and 5 minutes for your boss to read. Highlight your accomplishments, your challenges, your upcoming projects.

Communication is the common ingredient for successful tri-fold management. Understanding the communication style of another and reaching them at the best time will make you a superior communicator.

The smart communicator practices what I call the Burger King philosophy: Have it your way! Find out whether people prefer their communication via e-mail, in person or in a memo. Do they want information throughout the process or only at the beginning and end? If possible, communicate as much as you can in person because nonverbal cues are often more important than the words alone.

When you communicate is just as important as *how* you communicate. Find out what time of day is best to chat. Of course, sometimes in the grind of a daily newsroom, you can't plan communication that way. But don't let that be an excuse for asking for a minute and then stealing a half-hour or more.

With practice, managing yourself, your peers and your boss can be a beautiful cake that you polish off one piece at a time — with a fork, instead of a toothpick.

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