



# Managing Up

## Participant Guide

**State of Tennessee Management and Leadership Development Pyramid of Learning  
A Part of the Level 3 Certificate Learning Series**

**Approved for use June 15, 2017**





# Managing Up

## Leadership in Reverse:

There is a concept in the leadership literature known as “managing up”. Several books and articles have been written on the topic of leading and managing those above you, such as Roger Gittiness and Rosanne Badowski’s book *Managing Up: How to Forge an Effective Relationship with Those Above You*. Tips such as establishing ground rules, setting priorities, etc., are common suggestions. Another aspect of leading from below is the idea presented by John Baldoni, author of *Lead Your Boss: the Subtle Art of Managing Up*. His advice is to remember that when one manages up the focus is on the tactical, while leading up is more strategic. Leading up requires one to think about the big picture, considering how actions impact the organization as a whole, much like a CEO (or Appointing Authority) must think.

Leading up effectively requires one to know the business of the organization, becoming a true student of the organization, knowing what its mission and goals are, what the culture is like, where does the executive leadership want the organization to be in the future (its vision). Once that business acumen is well known, Baldoni suggests one must establish three Cs with executive leadership – competency, credibility, and confidence. With these three, one can then start sharing ideas, in essence educating upper leadership.

This concept echoes the role of Nestor in Greek Mythology. In Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, Nestor is viewed as a wise counselor who spoke with “sweet words,” and had a clear voice that “flows sweeter than honey.” His advice reconciled the great warrior Achilles and King Agamemnon, with the eventual result of the sacking of Troy. Nestor understood that the army needed the skill of Achilles in order to be victorious; he understood the dispute between the two had an impact well beyond just the immediate pride each was holding on to. Of importance is not just what he said, but how he said it. He truly educated the king and the warrior; he didn’t speak words that hardened their resolve to not reconcile.

An effective leader who serves another leader must learn this skill of leading up. Such a person has to develop the ability to offer sound, big-picture advice, and to do so with well selected words. In essence, such leaders function as advisors, much like Nestor. Gaining the reputation of having the three Cs of competency, credibility, and confidence, only come with practice and knowing the business of the organization. The results, however, can help executive leadership and the organization achieve the mission and eventually realize the vision.

**Dr. Trish Holliday, SPHR, SHRM-SCP**  
**Assistant Commissioner and Chief Learning Officer**  
**Department of Human Resources/SLS**

## **Introduce yourself following the criteria below:**

- Name
- Division you work for in the agency
- Role
- One learning expectation you have for this workshop

## **Learning Objectives**

**Upon successful completion of this workshop, participants will be able to:**

- **Define Managing Up**
- **Explore the Employee's Role in Managing Up**
- **Develop Successful Strategies for Managing Up**
- **Practice Managing Up Strategies**

## Ice Breaker: IDEAL Supervisor

Review the cards and decide as a table group the skills from most important to least important that are essential for a manager or supervisor to be successful. List your prioritized skills in the blanks below.

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

### List of Essential Management/Supervisory Skills

- Interpersonal Relationships
- Strategic Thinking Skills (planning ahead and predicting what was going to happen)
- Visionary Skills
- Flexible/Adaptable to Change Skills
- Self-Management/Learning Agility Skills
- Team Player
- Critical Problem Solving Skills
- Ethical/High Personal Standards Skills
- Quality Decision Making Skills
- Data Driven Results Skills

**Debrief:**

- Why do you think these skills are key to managing effectively?

---

---

---

---

- Which of the skills do you think are most challenging for supervisors? Why do you think that is the case?

---

---

---

---

- What other skills are essential for an ideal supervisor to be successful?

---

---

---

---

- How can this activity help you recognize what you need to learn to be an effective supervisor and relate to your manager more effectively?

---

---

---

---

## The Skill of Managing Up:

When you hear the term managing up, what comes to mind?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Definition of Managing Up:

“Managing up is caring enough about your work and the success of the organization to do whatever you can to help your supervisor be most successful. This includes proactively communicating, collaborating, assisting, and coaching your supervisor when helpful.”

**-Flex Jobs, 2015**

## Another definition:

“Managing up is a method of career development that’s based on consciously working for the mutual benefit of yourself and your supervisor. It doesn’t mean avoiding work, rebelling, kissing up, or trying to turn the tables on a higher-up, but instead understanding your supervisor’s position and requirements and making yourself known as a stellar employee by exceeding his or her expectations and needs.”

**-Harvard Business Review, 2015**

**Guided Discussion:**

1. What are some key words in the definitions that are important to remember when managing up?

---

---

---

---

2. What key concepts from the definitions have you demonstrated in relationships with former supervisors?

---

---

---

---



**"Managing up" is important because it allows you to....**

- Establish and maintain a positive and productive relationship with your supervisor.
- Ensure that your supervisor's needs are met.
- Ensure he or she receives timely and accurate information.
- Demonstrate that you are an effective and open team player.
- Enable your supervisor to make better decisions that represent and support the team.

How can knowing how to help your supervisor be successful support the team?

---

---

---

---

---

## Key Factors in Managing Up

-  **Influencing** organization policy by proposing and/or supporting change
-  **Advocating** for the needs of the direct reports/team
-  **Contributing** to service and program development by proposing strategies
-  **Influencing** management and providing constructive feedback



- **Influencing** organization policy by proposing and/or supporting change
- **Advocating** for the needs of the direct reports/team
- **Contributing** to service and program development by proposing strategies
- **Influencing** management and providing constructive feedback

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Key Factors Table Group Activity:

Individually, think of ways you have demonstrated the key factor assigned to your group. List the examples in your participant guide. You will be given 5 minutes to list your examples. After 5 minutes, share your list with your table group. As a table group, compile your findings on flip chart paper. Assign a writer and a reporter for the group. You will be allowed 10 minutes to compile your list. At the end of 10 minutes, present your table group examples to the large group.

Individual Examples:

---

---

---

---

---

---

Table Group Examples:

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Debrief:**

- Which of the key factors are easiest to impact at your agency?  
Most difficult? Why?

---

---

---

---

---

- What did you learn from participating in this activity about your role as someone who manages up? Are you an influencer, advocate, or contributor?

---

---

---

---

---

- How will you apply what you have learned once you get back to work?

---

---

---

---

---

## Questions to Ask Your Supervisor Activity:

Select a partner, someone who you do not work with on a day to day basis or that you have not worked with today. Using the questions below take turns interviewing your partner, then switch roles. One will act as the employee gathering information from their supervisor and the other will act as the supervisor. You will have 25 minutes to complete the interview process.

1. How would you describe your management and leadership style?

---

---

---

---

---

2. What are your goals and top priorities for this team?

---

---

---

---

---

3. What is your definition of a “top performer”?

---

---

---

---

---

4. What does “success” for this team look like to you?

---

---

---

---

---

5. How do you expect this team to help contribute to the goals of our organization?

---

---

---

---

---

6. What is the path that led you to this job?

---

---

---

---

---

7. How do you prefer that I communicate with you – email, in-person, etc.?

---

---

---

---

---

8. How do you like to be approached regarding an issue or challenge?

---

---

---

---

---

9. How often do you want to meet with us as a team and on a one-to-one basis?

---

---

---

---

---

**Debrief:**

- Upon reflection, what did you learn about yourself as a result of participating in this activity?

---

---

---

---

- Why is it important for employees to have this kind of information about their supervisor?

---

---

---

---

- In reviewing the questions, which questions would be important to ask of employees you supervise? Why?

---

---

---

---



## Guidelines for Managing Up:

- Communicate in the preferred style of the supervisor

---

---

- Do not surprise the supervisor

---

---

- Provide solutions, not problems

---

---

- Understand your supervisor's perspective and preferences for getting things done

---

---

- Understand your own management style

---

---

- Depend on your supervisor's strengths and leverage them

---

---

- Recognize your supervisor's blind spots and compensate for them

---

---

(Continued next page.)

- Be aware of what is important to your supervisor
- 
- 

## **Checklist for Managing Up:**

**Make sure you understand your supervisor and his or her context, including:**

- ✓ Goals and Objectives
- ✓ Pressures
- ✓ Strengths and blind spots
- ✓ Preferred work style

**Assess yourself and your needs, including:**

- ✓ Strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Personal Style
- ✓ Predisposition toward dependence on authority figures

**Develop and maintain a relationship that:**

- ✓ Fits both your needs and styles
- ✓ Is characterized by mutual expectations
- ✓ Keeps your supervisor informed
- ✓ Is based on dependability and honesty
- ✓ Selectively uses your supervisor's time and resources

**-Gabarro & Kotter**

## Managing Up Experiences- Guided Discussion:

- Describe a situation in which you made your supervisor look good or made it easy for him or her to manage you or your team.

---

---

---

- In what ways can you leverage a supervisor's strengths to support the team and/or the organization?

---

---

---

- In what ways can you compensate for a supervisor's managerial blind spots in order to help him or her out?

---

---

---

## Table Group Activity-Scenarios:

Read the scenario that has been assigned to you by the facilitator. Answer the following questions based on the information that you have learned so far:

1. What are some strategies that you would put in place to handle the situation in the scenario with your supervisor?

---

---

---

---

---

2. What would be some obstacles of enacting the strategies?

---

---

---

---

---

3. What are some ways to overcome those obstacles?

---

---

---

---

---

## **Scenarios:**

### **Scenario 1**

Your supervisor is stressed and exhausted but won't ask for help; you are under-utilized.

### **Scenario 2**

Your supervisor is heavily involved in the legislative process and is unavailable and you need some face time. You would like feedback on your job performance.

### **Scenario 3**

Your supervisor drops projects on your desk without warning; throws off your time management.

### **Scenario 4**

You share the same vision as that of your supervisor in achieving a particular goal for a project; however, you feel your way of achieving that same outcome is more cost effective, timely and efficient.

### **Scenario 5**

You are new in your job role with a new supervisor, and you do not understand how your job supports the agency's mission, vision and values. You think context would increase your motivation and productivity.

## Debrief:

- What did you learn from participating in this activity?

---

---

---

---

- How will participating in this activity help you to effectively manage up once you return to work?

---

---

---

---

## Tips for Managing Up:

**Work Toward a Mutual Goal:** Be sure to clarify and confirm the mutual goal between yourself and your supervisor. When you and your supervisor work towards a mutual goal, you are showing you are capable of being part of a team.

**Exceed Expectations:** Establish realistic goals and objectives and figure out how to exceed them. When you exceed expectations, you show that you are capable of doing more.

**Jump In:** If the opportunity arises, offer to help or provide a solution. Showing initiative and willingness to take on a challenge highlights your abilities.

**See the Big Picture:** Leaders look at the big picture, not just the here and now. Explain why understanding the vision is essential to avoid operating in a silo. Get involved and get interested in things outside of your role.

**Keep Your Manager or Supervisor Informed:** Keeping your manager or supervisor in the loop on your work or project progress is important. Equally so is the desire to learn new tasks and move into a higher-level job.

**Be Proactive:** Being proactive shows that you can take initiative and shows that you have the ability to manage down.

## Three Questions When Managing Up:

- What does the supervisor need?
- What does the team need?
- What can I do to help the supervisor and the team succeed?

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Final Debrief:

- What did you learn from participating in this workshop?

---

---

---

- How will you apply what you have learned once you get back to work?

---

---

---

---



**Three Immediate Actions:**

Write down three immediate favorable actions to share with the group.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Did we meet our learning objectives?**

- Define Managing Up
- Explore the Employee's Role in Managing Up
- Communicate Successful Strategies for Managing Up
- Practice Managing Up Strategies

**Resources:**

Maxwell, J. C. (2005). *The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson

<http://uthscsa.edu/gme/documents/TheArtofManagingUp.pdf>

<https://hbr.org/2015/01/what-everyone-should-know-about-managing-up>

<http://www.cathyhammer.com/pdfs/ManagingUp.pdf>

<http://idealistcareers.org/the-dos-and-donts-of-managing-up/>

Managing Up: Relationship Building Between Middle Management and Top Management", by Michael, J. Austin, PhD, Administration in Social Work, Vol. 12, 1988

"Managing Your Boss", Gabarro and Kotter, Harvard Business Review, 1986,2005

Baldoni, J 2010, *Lead Your Boss: The Subtle Art of Managing Up*, New York: AMACOM





**These materials have been designed to develop specific knowledge and skills for State of Tennessee employees. They represent the proprietary intellectual property of the State of Tennessee's Department of Human Resources, Strategic Learning Solutions Division. Permission granted to Tennessee state agencies to reproduce these materials in whole without alteration using the state of Tennessee publication guidelines.**



Human Resources, authorization No. 319611, 250 copies June 2017. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$3.98 per copy.