



For many Information Technology and Human Resource professionals, the New Year brings the start of a new job and with it comes a new boss with his or her own management style, habits, pet peeves and vision. Adapting to a new boss may not be as stressful as some other workplace hurdles, but it's nothing to take lightly. In fact, managing the transition to a new supervisor can enhance your career if you play it right, or it can be fraught with peril if you bungle it.

According to the book *Managing Your Career for Dummies* by Max Messmer, it's critical that you and your boss get off on the right foot together. Good chemistry - how easily your personalities mesh - can help tremendously, especially if you both have similarities in your backgrounds, similar values, and a similar sense of humor. It doesn't hurt either to share a passionate concern for the fortunes of a local sports team or a deep involvement in the same hobby. But even if the chemistry is great, Messmer says, you still need to make sure that you share a common understanding of the following job-related issues:

Your Basic Responsibilities: What's expected of you and where does your job fit into the scheme of things, based on your company's strategic goals?

Values and Standards: What is the basis for measuring your job performance? Does your manager have his or her own standards in addition to those of the firm?

Work Process: Particularly with respect to projects you and your manager will be working on together, what are the processes that shape workflow and efficiency?

Basic Rules and Procedures: What are the formal rules that affect performance? Are you encouraged to introduce innovations in procedures or are you expected to do everything strictly by the book?

Don't underestimate the importance of reaching accord on each of these issues just mentioned, however fundamental they may seem. A mutual understanding of these matters can go a long way to preventing many of the problems that underlie troubled manager-employee relationships.

Before you start your new job, though, try to find out some background about your new boss. If possible, interview your new boss's former colleagues to find out about his likes or dislikes, idiosyncrasies, favorite sports or charities. Find out about the companies where he's worked, his successes and failures. And don't overlook his approach to corporate culture. Is he a risk-taker or conservative?

Answers to these questions will help you adjust to the new management approach, says Emory Mulling, head of the Mulling Group, an executive coaching firm in Atlanta. In particular, he says, you should focus on the new boss's communication style. Does he prefer that you casually drop by his office, or does he want you to make an appointment? Are rough drafts fine or does he like formal memos?

If you take the wrong approach, Mulling adds, you can turn off your new boss very quickly since first impressions are crucial. Your new supervisor will be sizing you up during your first meetings, so it's essential that you appear open and eager to be an important part of the new team. During your first meeting you should concentrate on listening to what the boss wants to talk about, not on laying out your own agenda. This is when you can draw on your homework by knowing what to emphasize when it's your turn to speak, and also what to avoid.

Your manager's wants, needs, and priorities should always take precedence over yours, Messmer says. The best way to remind yourself of this is to always think of your boss as a client or customer. Also, try putting yourself in your new boss's shoes. This will help you be more empathetic. It also could help you anticipate your new supervisor's needs, which in the end would advance your most important goal: being seen as a contributor in your new boss's eyes.

You'll also need to be willing to stake out a position different from the new boss's, drawing on your own body of knowledge and expertise, advises Mulling. The key, though, is to do so tactfully and not in a manner that will threaten your supervisor. You can ensure your own success by providing useful and candid information. And finally, how well you work with your boss will have more bearing on your ability to put your skills, knowledge, personal attributes and motivation to the most effective use in your job. It will also have more bearing on how much you learn in your job, how much satisfaction you derive from it, and how successful you are in achieving your own goals.