

training

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Reaching Consensus: Confronting Your Supervisor...Wisely

by Michael Rosenthal

My boss asked me to propose a 2009 budget that we were to discuss in yesterday's meeting. Having spent many hours preparing, I was ready to present my ideas. However, the meeting consisted of my boss handing me a budget she had developed "for my review"—clearly fait accompli. How should I communicate my frustration with her?

There are a number of issues you might wish to discuss with your manager:

- (1) Your frustration (and other emotional reactions)
- (2) The turn of events
- (3) How things should be handled in the future

Before initiating the conversation, however, be sure your emotions are in check. When emotions are at their peak, reasoning capacities are physiologically at their weakest.

While communicating your frustration might be the first thing on your mind, it might be best to begin by discussing your interpretation of the turn of events. Since none of us is infallible, your perspective on what happened might not be entirely accurate. And there's a good chance your manager has a different view of how things unfolded.

Approach your conversation from the vantage of curiosity. Rather than accusing your boss of misdoing, try to learn more about the process itself—perhaps there was a reason your boss moved ahead without you. Start with something like, "I'm a little puzzled by the budgeting process—I was under the impression that you were relying on me to prepare a first draft, and it seems from our meeting that wasn't the case. Was my assumption wrong all along?" This type of opening introduces the topic without putting your boss on the defensive or casting you a "complainer."

You are bound to learn new information. Maybe her decision changed. Maybe you misunderstood her original request. Maybe, with all of the things on her plate, she simply forgot that she assigned you the task. Or, maybe, she just miscommunicated herself in the meeting—she is planning on comparing your ideas with hers. In the end, once you hear her perspective, you can digest the new information and respond appropriately.

Your conversation should then transition to you sharing the impact the situation had on you. Isolate the impact on you from any aspersions of negative intent on her part—just because you feel frustrated and marginalized doesn't mean she intended for you to feel that way. You might try something like, "I feel somewhat frustrated because I juggled my schedule and worked late to work on the budget, only to find that it seems you had completed the assignment." (Remember,

she also might feel frustrated when she considers that she didn't have to do the work.) Hopefully, your manager will acknowledge your feelings and explain her intentions.

Finish up by jointly mapping out a plan for avoiding confusion and frustration around similar issues in the future, incorporating the data you learned in this conversation. One example might be "Going forward, I'll send you an e-mail following our initial meeting articulating my understanding of what my contributions on the project are expected to be to ensure we're on the same page." Your particular solution will be defined after you and your manager uncover the factors that contributed to the situation.

This conversation should not only clear the air, but also should help develop your relationship with your boss.

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