

Charlize Theron: older, wiser, happier

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MAGAZINE

Charlize THERON

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TO MAKE
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ELIZABETH
GILBERT
“Be creative
and curious”



How to manage your manager

Helping your boss look brilliant – and making their job easier – could be the best career move you ever make. Suzy Bashford explains how

ILLUSTRATIONS ANNA GODEASSI

Listening to my friend keep saying that she couldn't believe what an idiot she'd been, I felt for her. Having spent hours helping her boss prepare for an important meeting, he aced the presentation, but failed to acknowledge her contribution at all. 'I should have told the big cheeses those were my ideas!' she said. 'Instead, I just smiled and gushed about the great job he'd done. I like my boss, but I don't like that he takes all the credit for my hard work and I don't get anything back.'

Yet according to leadership experts, what my friend did in selflessly making her boss look good is the most career-enhancing move you can make. There's even a term for it: 'managing up'. By helping your boss succeed, even if you don't share the glory, you're proactively navigating your relationship with them so they feel positively towards you. Ultimately your career, not to mention your wellbeing at work, will thrive.

This mind-shift can be hard to get your head around, but it's worth trying. The need to manage up is on the rise, driven by workplace changes such as the end of job-for-life security and the erosion of rigid hierarchies, meaning individuals increasingly need to take more control of their careers.

'Approach managing up, especially of a new boss, like you're going on a blind date,' says psychologist Dr Sandi Mann, who has published a second edition of her book *Managing Your Boss in a Week* (Teach Yourself, £7.99) due to a resurgence in demand. 'You want to suss them out, impress them, make

them happy and create a mutually beneficial relationship. What people often don't get is that managing up is about making life better for you.'

First things first

The first step in managing your boss is building up your confidence in your strengths and sense of self. That is because, explains career coach and BBC Radio and Music head of business operations Barbara Greenway, you have to be 'ready psychologically' before you tackle this all-important, career-defining relationship.

'You have to start from the inside, before going out,' she says. 'Women, in particular, have to remind themselves what they do well. When they do this, their energy rises, they're in a more positive frame of mind and so that means they can take positive action.'

Greenway often recommends that her mentees devote significant time to considering their strengths and values

“What people often don't get is that managing up is about making life better for you”

>>> before even attempting to manage up, pointing them to online resources such as viacharacter.org.

Once you have a good handle on how you *really* tick, not just a superficial understanding of your tendencies – turn your attention to understanding your boss at a deeper level, too. While experts agree on the importance of this, they recommend many ways to do it. You can physically sit in a different chair at work and imagine you are your boss. Shadow them for a day. Psychologically profile them through online and offline tools. Or you can, advises Karen Meager, psychotherapist and author of *Real Leaders for the Real World* (Panoma Press, £12.99) ask questions like: ‘What floats their boat? Is it getting recognised? Is it doing a quality job? Do they care about teamwork? You need to look behind what they say they want and observe their behaviour on a day-to-day basis. If they say respect is important but treat people badly, it’s not really important. Observe what they spend time on. What takes priority? What things or people will they drop easily – or not?’

Knowledge is power

Once you’re armed with knowledge, you can then determine your communication style to get the best out of the relationship. The tricky part is that, although we might know that our boss has a different view of the world, we still often unconsciously expect them to intuitively understand ours, as our outlook is so embedded. If they don’t, we grow frustrated, and this can lead to misunderstandings. And, given that their boss is the number one reason people give for leaving jobs, I’ll wager misunderstandings are rife.

Reminding yourself that roughly only 15 per cent of people share your basic personality type can help reduce frustration and increase empathy, says Will Murray, founder of personality profiling cards Packtypes (see panel,

right). So can remembering that if you remain in a fixed mindset, benign misunderstandings are more likely to grow into malignant disagreements. Because of the power dynamic, the less senior person can become the ‘victim’ and blame the evil/power-hungry/incompetent (delete as appropriate) boss for everything. ‘But nobody is a victim. Your boss only has control of your attitude if you let them,’ Murray says. ‘Anybody can make the first move to improve a relationship. You’re just as well placed as your boss.’

The best way to prevent misunderstandings is through regular feedback; little and often is better than the stress,

“Anybody can make the first move to improve a relationship. You’re just as well placed as your boss”

pressure and often inefficacy of an annual review. Striking the right tone can be, admittedly, difficult – if you’re too confrontational you seem aggressive, if you’re not authoritative enough you may seem weak and whiney.

‘What you’re aiming for is nurturally assertive,’ says Shaun Thomson, CEO of Sandler Training. ‘You’re not being confrontational or critical. You are not being childlike or walked-over. But you are communicating with them in the way they like because you’ve taken time to understand the type of person they are. Be structured, concise, and plan what you say and the desired result. Be authentic, not just in your words, in your body language, too.’

Many of us struggle to manage up as we lose perspective and assume the worst. But often a boss’s behaviour isn’t personal; in the current climate of job cuts and slashed budgets, it’s likely

to be survival. A little compassion can go a long way to improve your relationship and, in the worst cases, prevent the last resort of quitting.

A view from the top

James Innes, chairman of The CV Centre and author of a raft of books on career management, had an epiphany when he became a boss. Up until then he’d always vowed to do his damndest not to be like his ‘incompetent, annoying’ former bosses. But the view from the top wasn’t quite what he expected, as he found himself overwhelmed by conflicting pressures, priorities and people, all vying for his limited time.

‘I’m not an idiot, though I may look like one sometimes,’ he jokes. ‘I haven’t forgotten my vow, but I fear I might appear inefficient sometimes because I can’t look into every issue in the detail others would like me to. My advice is yes, manage up. Don’t harass. See the bigger picture. And learn to be a little Zen about the relationship; don’t take everything personally, otherwise it makes for a very unhappy working life and, if it gets to that, there’s something to be said for getting out.’

Anyone with a boss would do well to heed this advice. After all, there is no other relationship at work that’s more important. It – emotionally and financially – pays to get it right.

MORE INSPIRATION:

- Go to viacharacter.org/www/The-Survey to get a free character strengths profile
- For more on Packtypes, see packtypes.com
- To get a clearer idea of what you want from your career to help with conversations with your boss, see valuecards.efairplace.com
- Get ‘strengths’ cards by positive psychologist Dr Ilona Boniwell at positran.eu or atmybest.com