

Article from **Policy Perspectives**

(http://www.imakenews.com/cppa/e_article000392220.cfm?x=b6Gdd3k,b30DNQvw,w)

April 27, 2005

Surviving Conflict with the Boss

by Ken Embley

Wow, is Utah “biting the hand that feeds it” when the Legislature told the feds to, as they say, “hang it in your ear” when it comes to the No Child Left Behind mandates. As it stands today, the consequences of their action is open to debate but the actions of our Legislators started me thinking about surviving conflict with people, like your boss, people who have power over you.

With the No Child Left Behind mandate, the risk our Legislators take is the loss of several millions of dollars in education funding. With your boss, the risk is lost of trust, prestige, and access, placement on the workplace totem pole or even the loss of your job. Well, what the heck, as we say in Utah, I googled the topic, looked in some books, found some articles and they all seem to share the same theme when it comes to surviving conflict with the boss.

In order to survive the conflict, understand that your boss has the upper hand.

This ***upper hand*** stuff is no simple matter. The playing field is ***not*** level and that makes managing this type of conflict a frustrating experience. However, to say it straight out, tough! The fact is the boss has the upper hand. Now, do you want to play the surviving conflict game or not? If the answer to this question is a resounding no, be prepared to suffer the consequences (and stop reading this article). If yes, I offer a few suggestions:

Work with the ***credos*** that the “boss is always right” and “make the boss look good.” Now remember, we all know that the boss is not always right. The point is the boss has the upper hand. Therefore, if the credos do not work for your particular situation, look for a different survival strategy.

Never let a conflict build because at some point, it might be too late and that can damage your career.

Try to ***recognize and resolve the true root cause of the conflict***. For example, a conflict with the boss can develop due to a *clash in personality, management style, technical differences*, or with such things as *performance and work habits*.

If your *personalities clash*, do not expect your boss to change. The same is true for their *management style*. ***You must try to adapt to their style, needs and expectations***. That means you listen to what they have to say and perform work in accordance with his or her wishes.

Never attempt to resolve a conflict with your boss by acting defensively or by arguing. It does not work. Take the high road by trying to understand your boss and the type of person he or she is.

Use sound, factually based and persuasive techniques when presenting proposals. Make your case describing strengths and weaknesses in relation to other concepts. Use a positive approach. In the end, if your boss decides against your approach, do not take it personally. It was your boss’s decision to make and you must abide by it and move on.

Performance and work habits need immediate attention. This is the case where your boss believes that you are not performing up to expectations. ***You must be willing to discuss these issues with the boss and listen carefully to his or her comments***. Ask what you

need to do to improve and set a clear timetable to track your results. If you reach this point, the only way to truly improve your relationship with your boss is to show a willingness to make adjustments and by demonstrating improved performance.

With every suggestion, you may believe I am suggesting that you voluntarily become the subject of a typical *Dilbert*tm cartoon. Well, you may be right or just maybe, the fact is that **the boss has the upper hand** and these suggestions might apply when you find yourself in a situation where you must play a tough conflict resolution game on an unlevelled playing field. So think how you might employ these suggestions given your particular situation and learn to survive conflicts with your boss.

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