

Ascend

Where your work meets your life.

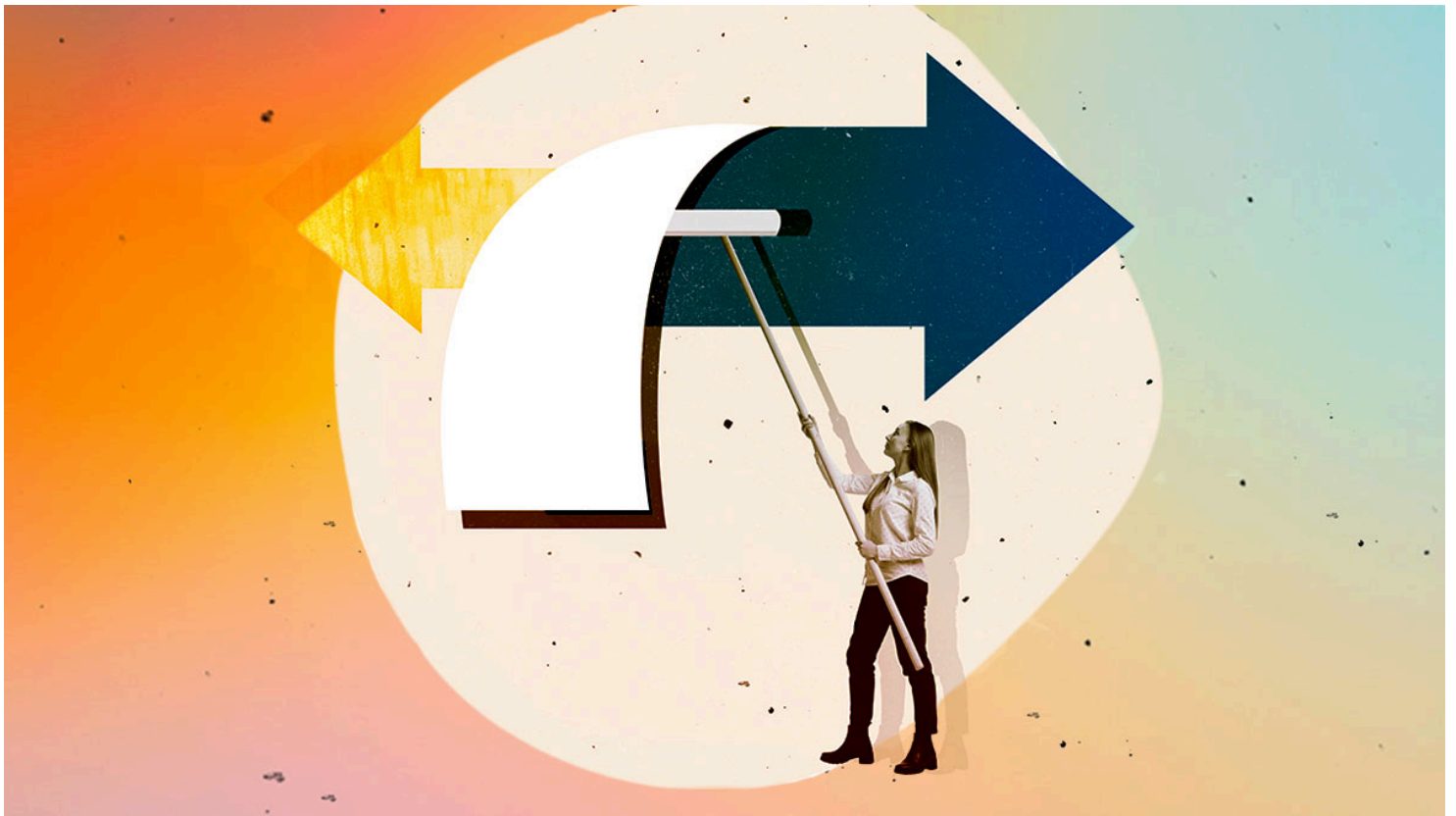
**Harvard
Business
Review**

Managing Up

Why Managing Up to Your Boss Is Not Enough

by Jenny Wood

February 09, 2023



HBR Staff; Anton Vierietin/Getty Images

Summary. Your professional advancement will be faster if you invest intentionally in leaders up your chain, people outside your core team, and a network beyond your company. When people of influence know you, they can advocate for you, offer you high-profile projects, and support your career goals. Here's where to focus your energy:

- **Managing higher:** Meet your skip-level manager. You can review your most recent projects, learn their priorities, or explain what customers are saying on the ground. If you're new to the company, you could also share your "fresh-eyes" perspective. If you build a good relationship with them, at minimum, they might think of you when a new opportunity arises. At maximum, they might promote you or give you a raise.
- **Manage diagonally:** Build a relationship with your manager's peers who are "up and sideways" — or diagonal — from you on an organizational chart. Typically, it's not just your manager who makes decisions that impact your future at work.

At larger companies, a committee often decides promotion and performance scores, so don't put all your eggs in your manager's basket.

- Manage outside: Don't overlook leaders outside of your company. Even if you're happy in your job, you never know when the Great Reshuffle might lure you to a new opportunity. Maintain connections outside your team, company, and industry, to increase your options when it's time for your next move. [close](#)

Most of us want to have a productive, healthy relationship with our managers. It's smart for our careers, better for business, and generally, makes life easier.

What we often overlook, however, is that, while managing up should start with our bosses, it shouldn't end there. Your professional advancement will be faster if you invest intentionally in leaders up your chain, people outside your core team, and a network beyond your company. When people of influence know you, they can advocate for you, offer you high-profile projects, and support your career goals.

That's why you shouldn't just manage up to your boss, you should also:

- Manage higher
- Manage diagonally
- Manage outside

If you feel hesitant to do this work, you're not alone. Building relationships with new people — especially people in positions of power — takes intentionality and can feel downright daunting. (I'm a Google executive, and I still get nervous proactively emailing people above me.) It's natural to feel butterflies as you consider what to say or how to take the first step. To reduce the starter friction of getting that initial meeting on the calendar, use the sample language in each section below.

Manage Higher

Meet your skip-level manager. As unscientific as this is, in a LinkedIn poll I recently ran, 36% of respondents had *never* set up time with their boss's boss. That shocked me. What a missed opportunity. You can offer so much value to your manager's manager. You can review your most recent projects, learn their priorities, or explain what customers are saying on the ground. If you're new to the company, you could also share your "fresh-eyes" perspective. Leaders rarely get this view, and they often appreciate it. When you add value to your skip level, it's good for your career. At minimum, they might think of you when a new opportunity arises. At maximum, they might promote you or give you a raise.

Unless your work environment is old school, developing a relationship with your manager's manager is not only normal — it's encouraged. You do, however, want to let your boss know

you're planning to meet, so they don't perceive you as going over their head. Sure, it can be nerve-wracking to email your manager's manager, but the benefits are worth the cost.

Here's what you might write to them:

Hi [name],

Hope all's been well! In your most recent weekly newsletter, you wrote that [insert project] is one of your global priorities for Q1. I'd love to get involved in this and learn more about your goals. I can also share how successful the [X] project was, which is related. Could I work with your administrative assistant to find 15 minutes for us to connect?

Thanks,

[your name]

Your skip-level meeting could cover any of these other topics:

- Walk them through three slides of your last big presentation; share something that shows them your

business chops or speaking skills (important skills for upward mobility)

- Ask them the best career advice they've received
- Discuss what you hear directly from customers
- Offer to help them on a workstream
- Share positive feedback

Manage Diagonally

Build a relationship with your manager's peers who are "up and sideways" — or diagonal — from you on an organizational chart. Typically, it's not just your manager who makes decisions that impact your future at work. At larger companies, a committee often decides promotion and performance scores, so don't put all your eggs in your manager's basket. At minimum, your boss's peers might informally sway decisions that affect your growth.

One particularly useful way to leverage these relationships is to directly collaborate on a project or get feedback on something that affects their team. You never want to force a reason to meet, so keeping it focused on a workstream that involves them is a smart way to go. You also don't need to go overboard on how many of these partnerships you build. If your manager has seven peers, get to know, say, two to three of them. When you build

relationships with your manager's peers, it's a tailwind for your advancement. Your boss shouldn't be the only one who's familiar with your skills and potential.

Here's a sample email you could send to your manager's peer:

Hi [name],

Hope all's been well since we connected a few quarters ago! I'm working on [insert project], and [your manager] mentioned that your team is launching a similar project. Your team might benefit from the learnings and setbacks we've already experienced, and I'd value your feedback as I continue to lead this. If you're open to it, I'd like to schedule 30 minutes for us to discuss.

[Your name]

Your "diagonal" meeting could focus on any of these areas:

- Ask where their team's priorities overlap with yours
- Request 15 minutes to present in their team meeting
- Learn more about their career path

- Seek their feedback on something specific
- Offer to mentor someone on their team

Manage Outside

Don't overlook leaders outside of your company. Even if you're happy in your job, you never know when the Great Reshuffle might lure you to a new opportunity. A record-breaking 57 million Americans quit between January 2021 and February 2022.

Maintain connections outside your team, company, and industry, to increase your options when it's time for your next move. Stay active on LinkedIn and connect with people who interest you. These are practical ways to nurture your outside network.

You might also have a passion project that's completely different from your core job. An external contact could help with that. Let's say you work in an operations team, but you also contribute to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work on your team. If there's a DEI leader who you follow on social media, ask them to meet! Different companies have distinct corporate cultures and priorities. Meeting people on the outside will always offer you a different perspective. At minimum, you might get ideas to bring to your current company, and at maximum, they might end up being the connection that gets you a job three years from now.

Here's what your direct message to them might look like on social media:

Hi [name],

Your last two LinkedIn posts on [topic] and [topic] deeply resonated with me. While I'm happy in my role at [company], I'm passionate about [topic]. You are such an inspiration in this area. Would you be open to a 15-minute phone call? I'd love to learn more from you and bring your ideas to my team.

[your name]

Your "outside" meeting might include some of these ideas:

- Ask them what they are most passionate about on X topic
- Share what you are passionate about on X topic
- Learn what they like most/least about their company
- Listen to how they got started posting actively on LinkedIn
- Request an intro to one other person who might be valuable to you

There is a caveat to all this additional upward investment — particularly when you reach higher or diagonally: Managing up can be perceived as sucking up. You want to manage these relationships tastefully, not shamelessly.

I once watched a VP at a Fortune 500 company give advice to a room full of new graduates. Someone asked what pitfalls to avoid if they want to be a manager one day. He shared four pitfalls, and one of them was, “spending too much time managing up.” (The other three were: not giving feedback, being afraid to make tough calls, and micromanaging.) That’s sound advice.

Investing an hour to managing up a week is worthwhile; spending two hours a day is overkill. And be elegant in your approach. For example, setting up time with your boss’s boss just to ask for a promotion can do more harm than good. Always offer value to the leader you’re meeting.

While you should be smart about your strategy, you fall prey to a bigger pitfall if you avoid managing up altogether. Your career will not advance without a strong network of leaders to support you: people above you, managers on adjacent teams, and people outside your company. The relationships you build are your offense for a thriving career. When you manage up, you up your game.

Jenny Wood is an author, speaker, Google executive, and founder of *Own Your Career*. Download her free five-tip guide here to get what you want in your career. Unapologetically.

Recommended For You

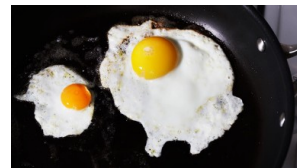
Managing Up Without Sucking Up



How to Manage Managers



Most People Have No Idea Whether They're Paid Fairly



PODCAST

What It Takes to Build Influence at Work

