

# Essentials of Managing Up (EMU)

A Complimentary Course from Distance Cert in Building an Effective  
Relationship with Your Manager



# Objectives

The course has the following objectives:

- (1)** To understand what “managing up” means.
- (2)** To be clear as to why we need to “manage up” at work and the benefits it has.
- (3)** To understand and be able to apply a range of approaches to “managing up” and know how it can be achieved.
- (4)** To know what to do and what not to do when “managing up”.
- (5)** To develop the knowledge, skills and mindsets required to effectively “manage up”.



# Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will:

- (1)** Be better able to “manage up” and influence your manager in a positive way.
- (2)** Be more assertive when dealing with your manager’s demands.
- (3)** Know how to “manage up” and have developed the necessary competences to do so.
- (4)** Be more proactive in your approach to work.
- (5)** Understand why managing up is a good thing for your career, time management, work-life balance and more.



# Recommended Reading

Harvard Business Review (2013) *HBR Guide to Managing Up and Across*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Harvard Business Review (2014) *20 Minute Manager: Managing Up*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.



# Task 1 – Discussion Questions

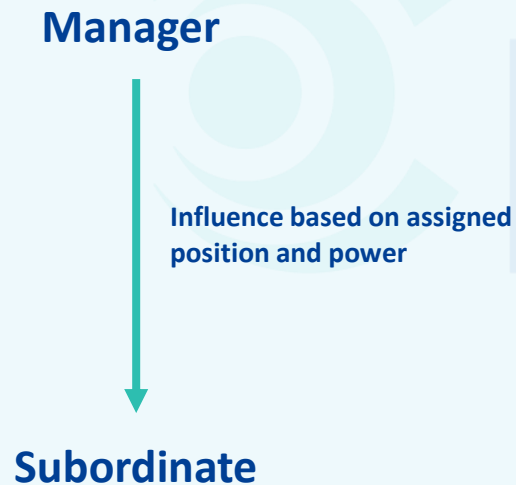
Consider these questions then look at the suggested answers on the next slide:

**What is “managing up” and what does it mean to you? What are the differences between “managing up” and “managing down”?**

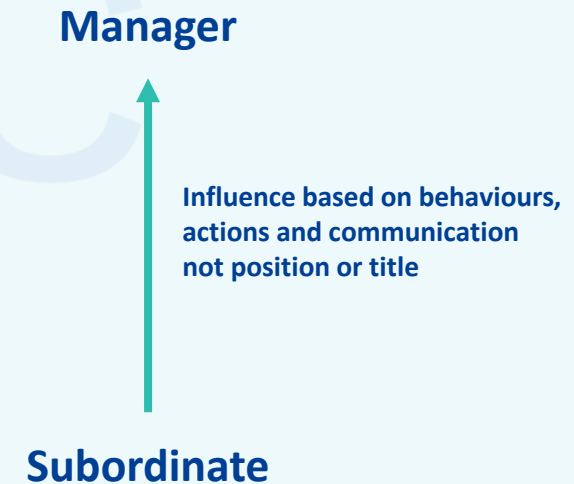


# Task 1 - Answers

**“Managing down”** is traditional top-down assigned management based on power and authority coming from title and position in the hierarchy.



**“Managing up”** is about using communication techniques and personal effectiveness to influence, support and change the behaviour of someone above you in the hierarchy in a positive way.





## Task 2 - Why “Manage Up”?

We have thought about what “managing up” is. We should now think about the purpose and how this approach can benefit us.

Brainstorm as many answers to this question as you can:

**Why do we need to “manage up” and what benefits does it have?**



# Task 2 – Suggested Answers

Managing up has numerous benefits to it:

- **You build stronger relationships with your manager**
- **It helps you avoid overload by saying “no” when it is justified**
- **Avoiding overload helps reduce your stress and allows you to concentrate more**
- **Controlling your workload helps you with your work-life balance**
- **It can help you earn respect and avoid the impression of being weak or submissive**
- **It helps you be in control but is not manipulative nor does it involve playing politics**
- **It sets boundaries**
- **It gets you recognised (and hopefully does your career some good)**
- **It can get you the support you need**
- **It prevents you being micro-managed**
- **It can turn your manager from a boss to an advocate for you as it makes them look good**



# A Case Study

Danielle works as a manager in sales in an industrial company. She leads a busy team of 12 people. Her manager, Hamed, is very focused on results and figures while Danielle is very people-focused. It is one of Danielle's responsibilities to provide quarterly reports on sales figures; Hamed, however, likes reports on a two-weekly basis. This is far too frequent and there is neither the need nor the system to justify this.

For months, Danielle felt as if she was “fighting fires” when faced with the urgency of Hamed's demands. Instead of tolerating the increasing demands and stresses, she tries “managing up” by being assertive with Hamed and explaining why this is not feasible and what will happen if this continues while mentioning how she appreciates the need to report figures and utilise KPIs. Hamed agrees with her and both leave the meeting satisfied with no offence taken.



# Managing Up or Fighting Fires?

Managing up is an antidote to “fighting fires”; look at this example:





## Task 3 - Ways to “Manage Up”

We have thought about the “what” and the “why” of managing up. We will now think about the “how” of managing up?

Brainstorm as many answers to this question as you can:

**How can we “manage up” at work?**



# Task 3 – Suggested Answers

There are various ways to “manage up”. These are given here in no particular order:

- |   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>(1) Be proactive and anticipate</b>              | <b>(5) Be positive</b>            |
| <b>(2) Match your manager’s communication style</b> | <b>(6) Be assertive</b>           |
| <b>(3) Ask and listen</b>                           | <b>(7) Justify your ideas</b>     |
| <b>(4) Keep confidences</b>                         | <b>(8) Have a solutions-focus</b> |

We will now look at each of these in turn.



# (1) Being Proactive

Being proactive means doing things that your manager needs before they ask you.

This involves anticipation and taking an “educated guess” as to what requests they will make of you in the near future.

Being proactive is a mindset, it is about shaping and taking control of events before they happen. It is the opposite of being reactive that means we are shaped by events.

You should consider when, where, how and with whom you can be proactive at work.



## (2) Matching Communication Styles

Your communication style and that of your manager may be very different. It is within your power, however, to adapt your style to theirs.

Consider, for example, if your manager is very direct and likes short, sharp to-the-point communication. If your communication style tends to be rather indirect, you may be viewed by a very direct manager as “rambling” or “waffling”; adjusting your style to theirs is more likely to keep them happy.



## (3) Asking and Listening

Asking your manager questions in times of stress and listening to them has numerous benefits:

- **It supports them**
- **It build relationships**
- **It gets you recognised**
- **It helps you be identified as a trusted partner**
- **It identifies needs**

You should listen on different levels:

- **Attentively and actively to show you are interested**
- **Empathically for their feelings and needs**
- **Facilitatively to find out what you can do for them**

This, however, does have ethical concerns as we shall see on the next slide.



## (4) Keep Confidences

If you are building a relationship with your manager, especially when asking questions, you may become aware of some workplace politics, controversial issues, personal views or other private matters. As such, when managing up, we must act ethically and be prepared to keep anything secret.

Without this, any manager would be unable to trust you!



## (5) Be Positive

When managing up, it is important that we put forward the impression of positivity.

This does not involve being unrealistic or falsely or overly optimistic but is reflected in:

- **Highlighting the potential benefits or what can be done if issues are addressed**
- **Choosing your words carefully and making sure things are not overtly negative**
- **Being motivational to your manager and others**
- **Showing enthusiasm in your tone, face and body language**



## (6) Be Assertive

Being assertive does not mean you are being rude or impolite; this is something necessary if you are to manage the expectations of anyone above you and are to avoid becoming overloaded. There are ways you can refuse without using a direct “no”. Here are some of the most common ways to say “no” nicely (or at least not as impolitely):

### **(1) Explain why something is not possible:**

- “I am afraid I could not at the moment as / because ...”
- “At the moment, I am ... so I don’t think I would have a chance to ...”
- “With everything at the moment, I ...”
- “I am having to prioritise ... so ...”

### **(2) Offer alternatives:**

- “The best I could do would be ...”
- “Let me see what I can do and get back to you.”
- “It is not my area of expertise so ...”
- “If someone could take on ... then I would be in a position to ...”

### **(3) Make an attempt:**

- “I have tried to ... but I ...”
- “I couldn’t at the moment but let me check with ...”
- “Let me check if ... and come back to you in the next hour”
- “If I get ... finished quickly, I may be able to ... but will have to see how things pan out”



## (7) Justify your Ideas

When managing up and putting forward any ideas or concerns, everything must be justified and supported. This has numerous benefits to it:

- (1) Your ideas are less easy to dismiss as “thoughts”, “observations” or “complaints”
- (2) Your manager will better understand your thinking
- (3) Your manager will be influenced by the potential benefits of your ideas
- (4) Your manager will see, when relevant, the consequences of not listening to you in the case of a problem
- (5) You could be recognised as a problem solver or someone with strong acumen or commitment

You can justify your ideas by:

- (1) Explaining why you think the way you do (this is as simple as using “as” or “because”)
- (2) Giving examples of what has happened
- (3) Highlighting potential by explaining what could happen if your idea is followed and acted upon
- (4) Explaining, objectively, what the imagined consequences will be if your idea is not followed
- (5) Having data to support you and your ideas
- (6) Providing or stressing a timeframe including, if relevant, the need for urgency
- (7) Disagreeing in a respectful way and explaining why the perspective of another is not right



## (8) Having a Solutions-Focus

Going to your manager with problems is fine but this is much less influential than going to them with a solution to the issues you need to raise.

Focusing on solutions and actions rather than problems and recriminations (however true or tempting it may be) will be more important to your manager.



# Task 4 - Dos and Don'ts

What are the does and don'ts of managing up? List as many as you can think of:

Do	Don't



# Task 4 – Suggested Answers

Some suggested answers would be:

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anticipate your manager's needs</li><li>• Communicate</li><li>• Ask and listen</li><li>• Respect confidentiality and privacy</li><li>• Be positive</li><li>• Refuse if needed and be assertive</li><li>• Justify your ideas and provide support</li><li>• Bring solutions and ideas</li><li>• Be confident</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manipulate and play politics</li><li>• Offer only complaints without solutions</li><li>• Break confidences</li><li>• Be sycophantic</li><li>• Say "yes" to everything</li><li>• Escalate (go over their head) unless absolutely necessary</li><li>• Become complicit in illegal acts if this become apparent</li></ul>







# Quiz – Question 1

Which of these best defines “managing up”?

- (A)** Communication methods to build a relationship with your manager
- (B)** Saying “no” directly to your manager
- (C)** Agreeing to all the demands your manager makes
- (D)** Playing politics at work to your own advantage



# Quiz – Question 1 Answer

Which of these best defines “managing up”?

- (A)** Communication methods to build a relationship with your manager
- (B)** Saying “no” directly to your manager
- (C)** Agreeing to all the demands your manager makes
- (D)** Playing politics at work to your own advantage



## Quiz – Question 2

Which of these are reasons for why we might want to use “managing up”?

- (A) It supports your manager
- (B) It gets you recognised at work
- (C) It sets boundaries
- (D) All of the above



## Quiz – Question 2 Answer

Which of these are reasons for why we might want to use “managing up”?

- (A) It supports your manager
- (B) It gets you recognised at work
- (C) It sets boundaries
- (D) All of the above**



## Quiz – Question 3

Which of these best describes a way to anticipate your manager's needs?

- (A)** Being positive
- (B)** Being proactive
- (C)** Being communicative
- (D)** Justifying your ideas



## Quiz – Question 3 Answer

Which of these best describes a way to anticipate your manager's needs?

(A) Being positive

**(B) Being proactive**

(C) Being communicative

(D) Justifying your ideas



## Quiz – Question 4

When “managing up” and asking questions, we must respect what?

- (A)** Communication styles
- (B)** Needs
- (C)** Confidentiality and privacy
- (D)** Assertiveness



## Quiz – Question 4 Answer

When “managing up” and asking questions, we must respect what?

- (A) Communication styles
- (B) Needs
- ☒ (C) Confidentiality and privacy
- (D) Assertiveness



## Quiz – Question 5

If your manager's communication style differs to your own, how can you influence them more effectively?

- (A)** Get on with your job and avoid any discussions
- (B)** Adapt your style to suit their needs and expectations
- (C)** Ask more questions and listen
- (D)** Nothing, you should continue as you are



## Quiz – Question 5 Answer

If your manager's communication style differs to your own, how can you influence them more effectively?

- (A) Get on with your job and avoid any discussions
- (B) Adapt your style to suit their needs and expectations**
- (C) Ask more questions and listen
- (D) Nothing, you should continue as you are



Enjoyed this short course?

See what else we can offer you  
at **[www.distance-cert.com](http://www.distance-cert.com)**