

Tried-and-True Tactics for Managing Up, Down and Sideways

Linda Descano, CFA®, Executive Vice President, [Red Havas](#)

When my friend [Maria Ungaro](#) asked if I'd join a panel [Licensing International](#) was hosting for its Young Professionals Network (YPN) on managing up, down and sideways, I didn't hesitate to say yes, for two reasons.

First, this is a topic that has come up in numerous conversations since the pandemic has hit. We're all working in "2D," as [Sharon Weisman](#) calls this new work-from-home reality (or, as others have put it, live-at-work reality). I've been giving a lot of thought about management from the vantage point of the different roles I've played in my career—from individual contributor to people-manager to cross-functional project manager to three gigs in the C-suite.

Second, I'd be sharing the screen with two of Licensing International's 2020 Rising Stars—[Krystyna Braxton](#), apparel licensing manager, NFL Players Inc., and [Louis Yenik](#), licensing manager, Crunchyroll—alongside the YPN Committee chair and program sponsor, [Amber Alston](#), content marketing manager at [Flowhaven](#).

So it was a no-brainer.

Managing yourself

In my view, managing yourself is key to effectively managing your relationships with others, be it your manager (up), direct reports (down), or functional colleagues (sideways and diagonal). It's vital to take ownership of your actions and proactively manage your relationships. This allows you to

pivot on your front foot and reflect before you respond—versus reacting in the moment, which can undermine in seconds the reputation and credibility you've worked to build.

The five tactics foundational to managing yourself are:

- Integrity
- Empathy and compassion
- Active listening, meaning listening to learn and understand versus listening to confirm your point of view
- Self-confidence, meaning knowing your strengths, being keenly aware of your blind spots and trusting your gut
- Balance—and not just work-life balance, but also emotional balance, so you're always staying in control of your emotions and the situation

Below are some of the tactics that have served me well in managing relationships with others.

Managing up

- *Walk their walk and talk their talk.* Know your manager's priorities and goals, as well as what and how they are expected to communicate to their own manager and other executive leaders. Then adjust your communications style, tone, language and format—whether that's using bullets in an email or providing PowerPoint summaries—to match what your manager prefers and wants. This will help you better anticipate their needs and better position you and your team to stay aligned with their goals.
- *Keep them in the know.* Actively communicate what you're working on—both progress and potential roadblocks. Similarly, communicate changes that could have a significant impact; don't let your boss be taken by surprise. Own and manage the information flow.

- *Focus on insights and solutions.* When bringing a problem to your manager's attention, don't put the onus on them to digest and solve it. Bring forward your own insights and potential solutions, providing the rationale to support your position. Most managers appreciate getting the information in a drama-free, succinct and clear manner.
- *Mind their confidence—and have their back.* This should be self-evident: If your manager speaks to you in confidence, then it needs to be treated with the utmost care and respect. Even when confidentiality isn't the issue, never undermine your manager with others.

Managing down

- *Maintain a healthy communications flow.* Keep information flowing so your employees feel like part of the team and connected to the larger organization. And even though many of us can't walk around the office these days, emphasize that your "open door" policy remains in effect. Encourage people to come to you with issues, and make the time for one-on-one informal check-ins.
- *Listen to learn and teach.* While you may have a POV—and it could be the absolute right thing to do—listen thoughtfully to the ideas and insights your direct reports bring forward. Use their ideas as a springboard for coaching them to process their perspectives in the context of the company's financial, competitive or regulatory environment. That helps employees learn to apply that "filter" to new situations.
- *Be specific, straightforward and consistent.* My [Grandmom Nina taught me to mean what I say and say what I mean,](#) and her advice about being direct has served me well in all my relationships. Provide your reports timely, constructive feedback—but also "feedforward" with

suggestions and expectations for future performance.

- *Keep your inner micromanager in check.* Let employees do their jobs, giving them the autonomy and responsibility they need. Have their back and guide them so they are set up for success.
- *Give thanks and celebrate.* Too often we focus on the missteps and the never-ending to-do list, and we don't take time to thank employees and acknowledge their wins. Taking a moment to focus on the good can have outsized impact on employee morale and productivity.

Managing sideways and diagonally

- *Align yourself vertically.* Stay in lockstep with your manager so you have the resources and support you need.
- *Know where you have discretion and where you don't.* Understand how much latitude you have to present your team, function or business's needs and negotiate their position—versus where you need to take a big-picture perspective.
- *Mind the landscape.* When working across functions, lines of business or even markets, everyone will bring different perspectives and priorities to a project. Take time to understand the different motivations and definitions of success so you can present your position in a way that can be heard. This demonstrates that you're invested in the success of the project or initiative, not just that of your own team.
- *Stand by and own the outcomes.* Whether you agree with the final decisions or not, as a team member you need to own the team's outcome. Speak up during project meetings so your voice is heard. But don't sabotage the team when communicating outwardly just because some of your preferences weren't adopted.

What tactics have served you well? I'm always looking to up my management game and hope you will share your takeaways with me!



About the Author: Linda joined Red Havas in 2015 to spearhead the agency's digital, social and measurement practice areas. With more than 15 years of experience, she specializes in providing strategic counsel and tactical implementation of integrated communications programs, incorporating [PR](#), media relations, social media, content partnerships, influencer marketing, thought leadership and advertising. Her work includes a variety of sectors including financial services, economic development, pharma and corporate responsibility. Previously, Linda was managing director and global head of content marketing and social media at Citi, where she launched numerous digital firsts and served as president and CEO of Women & Co., the bank's award-winning financial lifestyle community for women.

Her honors include PR News' 2018 PR Professional of the Year, 2018 Campaign U.S. Digital 40 Over 40, 2014 Fox Information Technology Distinguished Alumni Award from the Fox School of Business at Temple University, 2014 Pinnacle in Leadership Award from the Girl Scouts of Greater New York, and 2013 Changing the Game Award from Advertising Women of New York (now known as She Runs It). Linda also served as a judge for The Content Council Pearl Awards in 2018 and 2017. Linda serves as a capstone mentor and advisory council member for the Fox School of Business M.S. in Digital Innovation in Marketing program. She currently serves on the board of directors of New York Women in Communications (and is a past president) and Servo Annex, a digital consultancy.