



Personal Tool

Working together for better leadership

This tool was created by one of our senior clinical team members, Kate McPhee, Psychologist & Clinical Associate Coordinator at AccessEAP.

Pause and think about how much time we spend working over our lifetime. The Huffington Post tells us that the average we spend is 13 years and two months over our lifetime in the workplace. For the lucky ones among us that does not feel very long at all. For others, we also recognise that this can feel like a prison sentence. After a snap lockdown in Victoria that reminds us that the pandemic is still not over, I know that I would personally really like to feel less stress and feel more fulfilled in my life so I can grow, learn, and flourish in 2021.

The reason that we suggest looking at ways to improve and/or develop a good working relationship with your leader is that work plays a central role in our day to day lives. This can be both a positive and negative influence, so it is up to us to create the balance we need in our lives. How can we exert some control and influence over our work lives?

How do we work with the leader that we currently have or develop a strong relationship with the new one that has just arrived? The answer will not surprise you: be proactive, ask questions and get to know your leader. My preferred way of gauging my manager's world view is to get them to tell me about their preferred recreational space (think hobbies or interests). I ask them about ways that I will know that I am succeeding in the role and how I stay within my role and use those pursuits as the analogy for our discussion. For example, if they garden – what would sprout success? If they are painters – what would it look like? Sports lovers are the lowest hanging fruit – learn the rules of that sport and get them to explain it to you in those terms.

There are many thriving employees who are being led in their workplaces by leaders who are aware of their strengths and their development areas. It's important to reflect on your own strengths, preferences and areas to develop.

Here are some practical tips I use myself and recommend:

- **Look up answers to your own questions** – rather than waiting to be told where the answer is in the document that holds the information, put yourself in the driver's seat so you can be more in control of your work.
- If something is not working in the leadership relationship, **address it respectfully** and quickly and then let it go once addressed.
- **Adapt your own conflict resolution skills** – rather than just yelling or avoiding.



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- **Think about what questions your leader is going to ask you before a meeting.** Put yourself in their shoes and try and make it as clear and as clean as you can – look through the issue/file/project and scan it like you would if you were a leader. This then prevents feeling off guard when they ask you a hard question.
 - **Take the approach that "all feedback is good feedback"** Recognise when it is done, clearly and with kind intentions – pause and take a breath and hear the feedback. Call out disrespect if this is really what happened. Then find a close ally or an AccessEAP counsellor to debrief it.
 - **Know your own working style** and then see how it contrasts (or is the same) as your leaders. How can the two of you bridge the gap?
 - **Get on top of your own stress management** so that you can communicate effectively rather than just on the emotions. Look at what your workload is and find ways to tackle it first and then go to the leader.
 - **Strive for open communication**, so if information that you feel is rejecting your idea or suggestion does not feel personal.
 - **Keep talking** – agree to disagree – but keep talking.



To help, talk to AccessEAP and our friendly team of counsellors who can assist. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

