

A Guide to Assisting Multiple Bosses



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Today's working environment often base a large part of their hiring decision on a candidate's ability to handle complicated and simple projects simultaneously. Whether it is a big corporation or a small company, employees are expected to work for several bosses. There was a time, two or three decades ago, when working for one or two managers was the norm. That is not the case anymore. After the economic crisis that started in 2005, when a huge number of people were laid-off as companies closed and trimmed their budgets, staying employed demanded advance skills and flexibility from workers. Jobs increasingly became more competitive to the point where workers must be able to work for nine and more supervisors at the same time.

Multi-tasking is an extremely important trait because it makes you highly marketable. It is the ability to work on numerous projects within the same time span. This skill is one of the major reasons why a particular candidate is selected among other equally qualified candidates. In order to effectively multi-task, you must utilize your inner resources and develop the skills that are natural to you. Remember that everyone can work at several projects at the same time but very few employees proficient at it. Most of them get rattled and panic when confronted with concurrent deadlines.

Put things in perspective. Always keep in mind that most of your bosses have to

answer to multiple supervisors, too. In order to help them attain their goals, you as their assistant must be very organized. Your organizing methods must be systematic, easy to understand and logical. Organization skills are developed through planning carefully and through mental visualization. These two qualities will enhance your skills. They also contribute to working in an unruffled and composed manner. Calmness inspires confidence. All your bosses will appreciate your professional demeanor.

Writing things down is a discipline. It is essential because as a human being, with a myriad of things to do for many people in your department and other departments, you are likely to forget things. Keep a small tickler file. A tickler file is a set of folders arranged according to importance. The purpose of your tickler file is to constantly remind you of day or the week's priorities. You can arrange them chronologically or label each of the folders with your supervisors' names in order to assist you as smoothly as possible when it comes to the projects' completion. You can also add folder for a list of things-to-do, reminders of meetings, travel arrangements and everything that you need to be aware of everyday. A tickler file is for your benefit. It is to remind you of time-sensitive materials. Arrange it accordingly.

A tickler can also be a notebook with the same purpose. Keep in mind that you assist many supervisors so use a big office

planner or Filofax. Don't forget to keep a calendar within reach. It is a good thing to tell yourself that your bosses are human. Like you, they have many things to do and will not remember everything. Your supervisors will be relieved when the information they need from you is easily accessible. Write their schedule, important phone numbers, and dates in your calendar or tickler. Put them on your desk so that your supervisors can find what they need without difficulty. You may be busy or away when they need critical information.

Yellow stickies are exceptionally useful as reminders. Make sure you use good quality stickies that will stay attached wherever you put them.

Keep your filing up-to-date. The best way to do this is to file the papers and documents as soon as you receive them. It only takes a minute or two. It will stop the papers from accumulating and save you a lot of time. You can also reserve a few minutes in the afternoon for the same purpose. You have to learn to anticipate. There will times when one of your bosses will immediately need information from one of the things you filed. If you can supply him or her with it right away, the likelihood is that your boss will not forget your efficiency. You should also have a locked drawer for confidential files, especially if your work is connected with Human Resources or Accounting. Contracts are often filed under lock and key. Use your judgment and ask your

supervisors which documents should be safeguarded and tell them where the key or keys are kept.

A clear and strong job description is imperative. It averts confusion and mix-ups. Assisting nine or more bosses is daunting but a good job description will create boundaries that will prevent job burn-out. It is a valuable document that establishes what is expected of you as their assistant. Your evaluation and raises will be based on how satisfactory you perform the responsibilities listed in your job description. Make sure that all your bosses are aware of what your job entails. Ask Human Resources or your primary supervisor for your job description if you do not have a copy.

Establish a bond with your primary boss. Your primary boss is responsible for your evaluations, continued employment and raise. That person is usually the head of the department. He or she may be the boss of your other bosses. Ask your main boss if you can meet every other morning or whenever it is convenient in order to prioritize all your supervisors' work. Meetings are usually at the end of the day or early in the morning. If he or she comes to work half an hour early, try to do the same in order to set the pace for the day's work, especially when you have numerous on critical projects to finish. When it comes to prioritizing our work, do and finish the chief's work first, unless he or she says otherwise. Priorities always change. It is

best to inform and ask to be informed. Do not second guess if you are in doubt.

As a policy, complete assignments according to the company's power structure. This means that you should perform the work according to who has the highest authority. If, however, all your supervisors are equal in company rank, try to set up a meeting with all of them once a week. Of course, there will be many occasions when not all of them can attend. In such cases, send them group e-mails to apprise them of the progress of their projects. This method is also effective if one or two of your supervisors are difficult to work for. This will enable you to inform them of your workload and get them to prioritize the work they gave you because you are not in a position to decide for all of them. You can also ask them questions and raise problems in your e-mails. For example, if the computer is not working and you cannot work on a project, it is wise to send an email informing your bosses of the problem and its duration. Sending e-mails is an excellent way of keeping a record of instructions and answers. It is a good way to protect yourself. Do not use company emails for your personal use.

Communication is paramount to a successful relationship with your bosses. You also have the power to set the tone of your office atmosphere. Do not let a day pass without talking to them. Greeting them or inquiring about their schedule is a way to open communication. Tell them if

the work that they are all giving you is getting out of hand. Speak up before your workload becomes unmanageable to improve the situation immediately.

Effective communication is also key to coordination. When the office is properly coordinated, work runs smoothly. Problems are minimal and people do not get upset.

Nip problems in the bud. Address potential conflicts before it escalates. Let your supervisors know if you cannot work overtime for more than two hours every day. Inform them that you can stay overtime for a few hours a week but not constantly. Be firm. Your health is important. If you do not take care of your body, fatigue and exhaustion will zap your energy and affect your immune system which leads to illness. Try not to do personal work for them, like getting coffee, unless it is absolutely necessary.

Treat all your supervisors equally. Do not favor one from another. It is not advantageous to have personal lunches or to individually get together with them after work, unless there is an appropriate occasion. As their subordinate, you cannot afford to do things that will question your ethnics and propriety.

All your bosses are reasonable people. They would want to be nice to you. It boosts morale. That being the case, as their assistant, they would want to take you out once in a while. Do not order alcohol

because it may make you tipsy and unprofessional. Do not tell them intimate things about your life. It is usually safe to talk about other departments. Should your bosses mention anything personal, just nod and agree. Keep the conversation to yourself.

Do not say anything negative or blame one boss to the other. Keep your conversations work related and pleasant. Do not gossip about them. Remember that their positions are higher up in the company ladder than yours. Whatever you tell people outside your department will likely get back to them. You do not want them to think of you as a gossip. It will create tension and intrigue that will not be favorable to your reputation. Your supervisors will distrust you. This could lead to termination or difficulty in working with them. Chances are, they will not give you a good recommendation should you want to transfer to another department or post.

Do not get involve in office politics. Do not take sides or gang up on a boss unless the matter is of grievous importance. Examples of this would be harassment, theft, etc. Remember that the boss whom you sided always has the option to take another job and leave you unprotected. The person you criticized or spoke against, on the other

hand, could stay permanently and get promoted. When it comes to the corporate world, managers do not forget these things. It is also a big mistake to pit one boss against the other, no matter how discreetly it is done.

If someone outside your department criticizes one of your supervisors, abstain from adding more criticisms. Say something neutral or complimentary to defend your boss. You can also change the topic. It is important to earn the trust of your bosses. You must never be quoted saying something disparaging about your supervisors behind their backs.

Always ask your managers for deadlines. Check your work twice before handing it to them. This may seem time consuming. It is, however, worth your while to spot your own mistakes. Precision is a major key to being retained in your position. Attention to detail is vital to your career. Remember you will make mistakes. Everybody does. The expediency of quickly spotting them yourself, even if you have to spend fifteen minutes reviewing your work is better than having your bosses and other people catching your errors. It also minimizes its occurrence, especially major ones that could cause your department time, money and the ire of your supervisors who will

likely have to work overtime to correct the consequences of your mistakes.

Create an incoming and outgoing work box. Arrange the papers according to their urgency. These boxes will keep your desk organized and save you a lot of time when you have a pressing project to finish because your bosses will not need to interrupt you. They can give you additional work in the incoming box or pick up their reports and documents from the outgoing box.

When given work or assigned a new task, ask your supervisors when he or she needs it to be completed. If the answer is ASAP, ask for a specific date so that you can finish it ahead of schedule. It is important for you not to feel anxious because the pressure may make you careless as you rush. You must have a clear mind in order to avoid mistakes from happening.

Once you are familiar with your managers, do not be afraid to quietly give them intelligent suggestions or show them how your resourcefulness could be valuable to their work. For example, you can make copies of articles that pertain to developments in their profession or job, including names or ideas for potential clients. Use your judgment.

Each of your multiple bosses is different. Try to silently and objectively analyze their personalities in order to constructively interact with them. If one of your managers happens to be forgetful when it comes to returning calls, put yellow stickies on his phone to remind him of the calls that he needs to return. You can also remind your supervisors of their meetings and appointments in writing. One way you can do this is to email the reminders a day ahead of time. If, on the other hand, one of your managers is concerned about the budget, give him discreet suggestions on how to save money for the department. You can start with the most obvious things, like saving money on printer ink which is expensive. You can suggest to the manager that it is less expensive to buy in bottles and to inject ink into the empty cartridges. He or she will welcome your suggestions if it is just between the two of you.

Develop a positive attitude. This may sound trite and old but a positive attitude goes a long way to staying employed. Be eager when your supervisors give you work to do. Remind yourself that many people are unemployed and be thankful that you have a job with benefits which you will not have if you did not have so many things to do. Ask your supervisors individually if they will allow you to bring a particular

work at home and finish it there. Nothing is insurmountable.

Be thick skinned. Do not be petty. Nobody wants to work with a person who is petty. Remember you are working for many people. You cannot be overly sensitive. Do not dwell on slights or perceived insults. These things are trivial. Stop yourself from getting emotional. Focus on finishing what you are doing. You have work to do. Successful people never allow their feelings get the better of them at work.

During holidays, you may find yourself with little to do since some of your supervisors will be on vacation, use the time to organize your work and catch up with things that are low on the totem pole. You can also use the moment to teach or acquaint yourself with the latest computer software. Do not waste time chatting with friends on the phone.

If you find it impossible to work with a supervisor, write a confidential memo about the situation to Human Resources. For example, if a particular manager keeps blaming you for things he or she did or failed to do, or if the person vents at you because you are in a subordinate position, explain your problem to Human Resources. Be specific. Tell them as emphatically that

you do not want to confront and get personal with your supervisor. After your meeting, write a memo to yourself about what you discussed and its resolution.

Although a small amount of stress can be conducive to productivity, refrain from stressing too much. It has adverse effects on your body and mental acuity. People who are overly stressed cannot concentrate and think clearly. They tend to forget things and make mistakes. Get a grip on your anxiety by reminding yourself of the things you had achieved in the past. This will usually give your subconscious the self-confidence you need to overcome the fear that you cannot handle the work.

Working for multiple bosses can be confusing, take notes. In time, you will be accustomed to each of your manager's unique managerial style and your approach will adjust intuitively.

Do not call in sick if you are not sick. One thing that you must remember when you have a large number of responsibilities is that you cannot afford to waste a day's work unnecessarily. The day you waste by calling in sick when you are not sick could be the only time when one of two of your managers who are often out in the field will show up at the office to give you work. By

not being there, you miss the opportunity to ask them detailed and explicit questions about the projects they assign.

Be punctual. Punctuality is a sign of reliability. You can also accomplish your objectives when you show up at work on time. Being late always produces tension. Your managers must never be made to wait for your late arrival. Try to get to work ten or fifteen minutes earlier before the start of the work day. Of course, there are going to be instances when you cannot help but be late but your supervisors will excuse you if you have a track record of being prompt.

Keep your word. If you told them that you can finish the project before noon, then

finish the project before noon. If you agreed to work overtime during your hiring interview, then work overtime. Again, earning the trust of your managers is the key to keeping your job. Be smart. If you make a mistake, admit that you made the mistake. They should not get blamed for mistakes that you made but minimize your mistakes by following the suggestions written earlier.

Finally, keep in mind that you are in control of yourself. Your work is your responsibility. You cannot control the personalities and eccentricities of your bosses, but you have complete control of your efficiency and inner strength.

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