

Being the boss of your friends: The realities of a copy desk chief

- When you are promoted, your relationships with employees are bound to change. It will be up to you to decide whether you want to continue those relationships. You may find it advantageous to keep those bonds tight, as an employee who is a friend may feel more comfortable talking to you about important work issues. The opposite might be true: Because you are the boss, they might not want to confide in you anymore.
- Confiding is no longer a two-way street. Your staff can confide in you, but you can't lean on your friends for support any more on work-related issues. While you might think it's in confidence, you never know what might be used against you if your friendship sours. Also, while some might like to feel like you're giving them the "inside scoop," most will fear that you might be as loose with their personnel information to others.
- The best way to curtail old habits is to let them die slowly. For instance, if you engaged in gossip before your advancement, you will want to curtail that behavior, but do not necessarily stop the friend/employee from gossiping and do not feel like you have to respond to or fix every complaint. Once you are established as the boss, the friend/employee likely will stop on his or her own.
- Remember, your friends/employees are watching you. Be sure to continue to offer support and honor their work. But do not hesitate to call your friend/employee on the carpet when necessary.
- Can you have a drink with your employees? Sure, but you shouldn't go unless they specifically invite you (a shout-out doesn't count), and you should be the first to leave. And be careful how much you drink; you are still a leader outside the office (in addition, you can be held legally responsible for your behavior outside the office the same as inside the office). Be careful that you don't "loosen up" and join in on the complaining or let management information slip.

Reflections on Leadership

From Friend to Boss

By Edward D. Miller

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One day you're working with a gang of friends on a newsroom team. The next you're appointed team leader and assigning editor. How do you handle the leap from friend to boss?

The challenge is to retain what you value in those relationships as they undergo the stress of change. Here are some thoughts that might help:

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Don't kid yourself; things have changed. Some people pretend that nothing has changed, that the old habits and attitudes between friends can be preserved intact after a promotion. But a lot has changed; you have a new role with different responsibilities and increased authority. That shift will color everything you do, including your social life. You may want to remain the old pal, but you've become the boss. Accept it.

Be patient with the resentment. It may be that your promotion was at the expense of someone still on the team. No one likes to be passed over for a job, so resentment is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be persistent. Be patient with those who feel victimized by your good fortune. You can sympathize with their "loss," but remind yourself that the promotion was someone else's decision. Time and your sensitive management will diffuse the resentment.

Identify common goals. Before you were promoted, you and your colleagues had understandings about common goals for the team. Identify and reinforce those shared objectives. They will be the basis for the team's work and relationships.

Support collaborative initiatives. A team's success depends on the effective collaboration of its members, so support ventures that require cooperation. Avoid having people work in isolation as you emphasize the team members' interdependence.

Use the friendships. Remember why you were friends in the first place. Altering your authority did not eliminate your caring and concern. Don't be afraid to continue to express those personal feelings. If they are genuine, they will endure.

Be yourself. You have to prove that you can do the new job, but you don't have to become a different person to do it. If you are self-confident, continue to rely on the style that got you the promotion. Don't affect a style that isn't authentic simply because you believe that's how bosses should act.

Remember how much you depend on your colleagues. When I coach people about how to manage the boss, I emphasize how much the boss needs them. Your boss's own career is dependent, in part, on how well you do your job. Remember that when you become the boss. You need them as much as they need you.

Early signals are important. Colleagues put a lot of stock in the early signals of a new boss. What you say and do first is important. Here are four messages to get across:

- You intend to be fair, and to be held accountable for your fairness.
- You intend to be inclusive and open to all.
- You intend to be flexible.
- You will continue to be a learner, and will depend on colleagues to be coaches.

Finally, remember why you were made the boss: You have a job to do. To get it done, you need to build new working relationships while maintaining old friendships.

Reflections on Leadership

When Friends Become Bosses

By Edward D. Miller

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How do you handle your friends when you become their boss? How can you establish authority while preserving friendships?

There are several challenges in this awkward but common situation:

- As a new boss, you will continue to be tugged back toward your old job. This is hardly a surprise. After all, it was your competence and confidence in that old job that contributed to your promotion in the first place.

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- Your new "subordinates" are also holding onto the past. Even if your predecessor was a jerk who deserved to be replaced, to your colleagues he was a familiar jerk. They had learned how to work with him (or around him, if necessary). Until you get equally familiar in the leaders' role, colleagues will treat you with caution.

As a result, you and your new colleagues have to give up some of the familiarity of the past as you explore the uncertainties of the future. That's a formula for tension.

There are four styles of leadership that a new manager must master.

- A strong leader can hold *autonomous* authority.
- That leader can *delegate* authority to team members.
- The group can be *consultative*, with the leader making the final choice.
- Individuals, including the leader, can agree to work toward *consensus*.

Leaders will have a preference, but need to master all four styles because the preferences of the team members have to be incorporated in the decision on how to operate a team. A leader may prefer to delegate, but if the group wants to be consultative, that is probably the style that will work better in most circumstances.

Here are some tactics that will help a newly promoted leader manage (and keep) her friends:

Don't dwell on what's changed. Your friends are as self-conscious about the promotion as you are. You don't have to apologize or speculate aloud how surprised you were to get the job. Just plan how to do it.

Don't change much right away. The fewer initial changes you make, the smoother the transition will be. Maintaining familiar routines for a while will be reassuring and stabilizing. If you must do something, solve some scheduling problems or eliminate some administrative hassles. Reducing some unnecessary grunt work is another quick way to score a success.

Listen a lot. Most bosses don't know enough about their colleagues' values, goals, and personal ambitions. A good opening move is to have informal but purposeful conversations to gather this information. Even if you think you know the answers, have the conversations anyway. You're certain to learn something, and your focus on colleagues will deflect the spotlight that's on you.

Pace your ideas. Don't be too smart too soon. Even if you're straining at the bit with good ideas, hold back. Authority comes with your new title, but respect has to be earned. It is the respect of your colleagues that will allow you to go forward. You build respect through expertise, helpfulness, coaching, recognizing good work, and involving others in important decisions. Until you fill up a reservoir of respect, try not to show off.

Focus on a new project. After an initial strategy at stabilization, you may want to focus the group on a new project that has widespread appeal. Breaking new ground will establish a record for the team with you as its leader.

Be careful about mandating change. People don't change because you want them to; they will change only if they want to. Be sure you can enumerate the benefits to them for any change you propose.

Take your time. New leaders invariably rush things. To preserve the friendships even as the relationships change, measure your pace carefully. Take time to talk to people about their work. Float proposals before you inflict them. Have a plan for each day on how you will work on key relationships.

Preserving friendships is important. A study by Karen Shen of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania suggests that people who are friends are more efficient than acquaintances in performing collective tasks. Apparently, friendship spurs and facilitates honesty, trust, and respect. She speculates why:

"The friends were able to challenge one another's ideas in a constructive way because they felt safe doing so...In the groups of acquaintances, people were almost too polite. They couldn't criticize one another because they were afraid of offending someone...Their interactions were typically of lower quality and less creative..."

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Finally, don't pretend that nothing has changed. You are different by virtue of your new status and authority. Be yourself, but remember that your new self is always on stage.

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A Management Partner

By Edward D. Miller

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Here's an idea that will help you grow as a leader: Develop a working relationship with a "management partner." The partner, probably a peer but not necessarily someone you work with directly day-to-day, can be an invaluable coach in at least three important areas:

- Your goals and standards
- Time management
- Self-evaluation

A management coach can be a mentor, sounding board, and reality checker. She will not tell you what to do, but will take seriously your invitation to help determine how well you're doing it and how you might do it better or more consistently.

An effective management partner would do three things:

1. **Coach your thinking.** None of us can claim to have developed our skills and savvy single-handedly. We all had people in our lives who, when we needed a wise counsel, listened instead of talked. They asked question after question to help us see the flaws in our reasoning or distracting power of our appetites. The best ones resisted the temptation to judge. They guided; they didn't direct.

It's important to recruit the right person; you don't need another know-it-all in your life. You need a friend who can balance candor and loyalty as she coaches your thinking.

2. **Monitor progress.** *"How am I doing?"* is a hard question to answer alone. Our capacity for self-delusion disqualifies most of us as reliable evaluators of our own progress. You need someone who can understand what you're trying to accomplish and give you the interim reports necessary for mid-course corrections. This requires an intimate knowledge of your goals, values, strengths, weaknesses, and fears. Not many of us are comfortable sharing any of that. A management partner needs to know all those things we are reluctant to admit to ourselves.

3. **Help you change.** In workshops on change management, I like to substitute the verb "transform" for "change." "Transform" comes from Latin roots that mean *"to carry across and establish on the other side."* That definition suggests there is something from the present you're taking into your future "on the other side," that there is a journey to be undertaken that will carry you away from your present place. Poets have used this image for a long time. My point is more practical: You need a traveling companion that can help read the map and negotiate the obstacles on that journey.

A management partner can help you see what you're doing consistently well, and more important, what you may be doing well but inconsistently. Responding to the imperatives of change is difficult without someone's active monitoring and gentle advocacy on your behalf.

Let's look briefly at three important tasks you need to master and how your management partner can help:

1. **Establish goals and standards:** Effective partners can ask important questions:

- *What do you want? What are your goals for this week, for next year?*
- *What will "success" look like? Is "success" worth the effort?*
- *What's required to make it happen? What do you have to do?*
- *How will you evaluate progress?*

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2. **Time Management:** There are two secrets to effective time management. It's not about time; it's about distinguishing between what's urgent and what's important. And you can't do it alone; you need to negotiate time with your colleagues.

A management partner can help you master both challenges.

3. **Self-evaluation:** Don't wait for the annual performance evaluation to get feedback on how you're doing. Recruit a partner to monitor your progress toward your important goals.

In theory, the work I've suggested for management partners is precisely what a smart manager does for her subordinates. In practice, too many inexperienced editors resort to command-and-control management techniques that prevent this kind of enlightened leadership. If your boss is already a "partner," consider yourself blessed. If not, go find one.

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