

Managing up.

Being a successful design studio manager isn't just about guiding the studio team, it's also about being a good employee and helping your boss do their job better/easier.

Mutually beneficial relationship.

The manager-boss relationship is one of mutual dependence.

Bosses need cooperation, reliability, and honesty from their direct reports. They need eyes and ears to see and hear things they can't. But it's not about spying, it's about filtering and translating information to keep them in touch with the activities of the studio.

On the other hand, managers rely on bosses to set priorities and supply critical resources.

It's a common to think of a boss as a giver: giving you the opportunity to be employed, to learn, to get promoted – but it's not all about you.

It's about you understanding her position as well, and making yourself a stellar employee by exceeding her expectations and needs.

To do that you need to know what she needs. Be brave enough to ask questions, don't wait to be told.

Communicate.

A design studio manager is often the conduit between an upper management (often the studio owner, but perhaps a design director) and the studio team.

Keeping management up to date with day to day activities can help simplify their tasks, eliminate potentially severe problems and improve productivity.

How often you meet and what detail they want differs from studio to studio. It's about meeting expectations, so make sure you understand what they want to know and how often they would like to know it.

This information should be covered in the job interview and documented in your job description.

When it turns pear-shaped.

Successfully managing your relationship with your boss relies on having a good understanding of her, and your, strengths, weaknesses, work styles, and needs.

Get to know your boss. To be able to communicate in a way that works for her, and to better understand what she wants from you, go back to the basics with questions like:

- » What is she ultimately trying to accomplish at this studio?
- » How best can you be an asset?
- » What's her style: Does she seem to prefer talking in person or over email? Does she make decisions based more on data or hunches?
- » What role (if any) does she envision you playing in her plans?

An open and honest conversation can identify areas that need work. Once that's done you can take actions to improve your relationship.

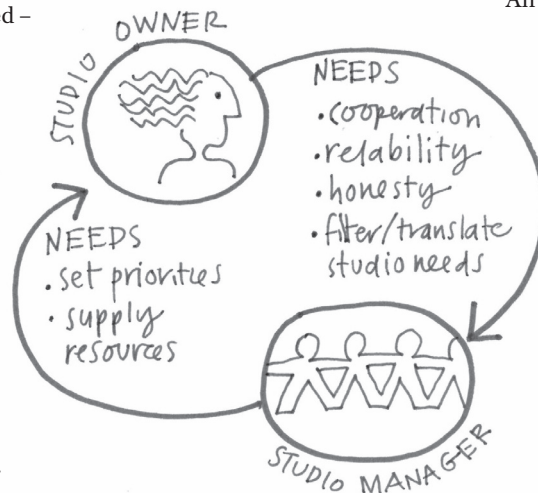
There is usually some common ground – a way of working together that will suit both of you.

Blow your own trumpet.

We're all busy. Too much to do with too little time.

A design manager's day is full of to-do lists an ensuring others do their job well. But don't forget to blow your own trumpet and remind your manager of the great job you're doing. It doesn't have to be grandiose. It could be as subtle as sending brief email updates.

Don't brag, just a sentence or two along the lines of: *"Just wanted to let you know that xyz project continues to go well, the client was pleased with our draft. The next steps are to finalise the numbers, which we will have for your review by Thursday."*



The update doesn't have to contain any real news. But in sending it, you'll look competent, communicative, and on top of things — all attributes of a top performer. It also helps your manager by keeping them up to date.

Solutions.

Most bosses want to be presented with solutions rather than problems.

Consider it as if a junior presented you with a solution. You may not agree, but if they have done their homework, it's an opportunity to see how they think, and to further engage.

Bottom line is, the reason most of studios are in business is to use design to create economic or monetary value. The most important part of managing up is to know what problem your boss is trying to solve in order to create economic value. That's how you can become an indispensable part of the solution.