

Hearts Touched With Fire

Tags: [#managing-up](#)

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Dialogue

In the Early Days of a Job, Figure Out Your Boss and Play to Their Strengths

What's so essential?

You worked for four really different people. How did you calibrate?

You say that it's important to build up the manager's strengths and diminish their weaknesses. How did you do that?

Speak Conscience to Power

Traditional advice -- speak truth to power. You invite leaders to instead speak conscience to power. What's the distinction?

How many leaders crave this...

Argue Your Case, Then Get on Board

Most decisions sent up to a president are close calls. We would not go to Reagan seeking a decision until we had thoroughly thought through every option. It seemed unfair to him and to the process if we went flying in and out of his office without being prepared first at the staff level—as we have seen in other administrations.

How did you and others in the West Wing find the discipline to do this?

Serve as Good Eyes and Ears—as Well as Chief Diplomat

Tell me about being Chief Diplomat...

How does it help?

Changed your mind?

Reserve

Jim Baker's three elements of success:

Gaining the trust of the Reagans, consolidating power in his own office, and surrounding himself with talented lieutenants.

Quotes

In my first days there, I discovered that the Clinton I knew, the man who had been one of the best, most innovative governors in the country, had lost more than his footing. In the hurly-burly of Washington, he had also lost his self-confidence. After a public event, he frequently asked me how he had done, anxious for advice. I wasn't sure what to do but decided that we shouldn't try to recast him as someone else. No, as I had seen with Reagan, we had to "let Clinton be Clinton." We had to encourage him to rediscover his old strengths and reassert his own authenticity. And that worked! The staff and I didn't get him out of the ditch; he gradually did it himself as we cheered him on. That's what a good staff does: It brings out the best in others, starting with the boss.

Speaking conscience to power is not only the right thing to do—it can also build your reputation.

One of the hardest challenges for a boss is to have a clear, honest reading of his or her own team members. Is their morale high? Do they feel respected? Do they see the work of the organization as meaningful? Someone has to have a finger on the pulse, quietly keeping the boss well informed. No surprises, remember. Usually the person who plays that role is the executive assistant to the boss or a deputy. Or it may be someone else close to the CEO. Conversely, that same person ought to be the chief diplomat for the boss, reaching out to colleagues beyond the inner circle, keeping them informed about the morale, moods, anger swings, and perspectives of the leader in the front office. Absent a steady flow of reliable information, members of the team may begin to feel distant and distrustful. Rumors can spread and morale can deteriorate.

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References