OPINION

Five keys to building a strong relationship with your boss in a hybrid workplace

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In today's evolving corporate landscape, the hybrid work model has emerged as a new norm. A hybrid work environment combines remote and in-person working, which can offer a great deal of flexibility to you as an employee. But it can also blur the lines of communication and interaction, leading to challenges in maintaining a robust relationship with your boss.

A positive rapport with your immediate manager is not just about staying in their good books; it is a pathway to career growth, job satisfaction and a harmonious work-life balance. So don't underestimate its importance.

While decreased and irregular face-to-face interactions in a hybrid environment can lead to misunderstandings or feelings of disconnectedness, these challenges are not insurmountable. There are deliberate measures you can take to lessen and even overcome these difficulties. Here are five specific areas you should focus on with your boss to keep the communication pipelines approachable and accessible.

Leverage technology to stay connected

While a face-to-face or telephone conversation will never go out of style, communication is more than just talking; it really is about staying connected. And this is where digital communication tools can bridge the gap.

Master technology tools for instant messaging (such as Slack, Google Talk, Messenger or WhatsApp); video conferencing (such as Zoom, Google Meet, GoToMeeting or Webex); and project collaboration (such as Microsoft Teams,

Miro, Trello or ClickUp).

Some of these larger platforms cover all three functionalities. Perhaps most importantly, know when to use each tool – quick questions via instant messaging and more in-depth discussions saved for video calls.

Take the initiative to schedule weekly or bi-weekly check-ins with your boss. These can be virtual, or in-person if your and your boss's office time happen to overlap.

They don't have to be long, but they are essential for staying on the same page and maintaining visibility. If you're not sure what your agenda should be for these meetings, then this article – How to maintain that long-distance relationship with your boss – outlines the six things you should cover in every check-in meeting.

Invest the time to craft your emails with clarity and precision. An upfront effort to be concise yet thorough will not only ensure your messages are understood as intended, but also save time in the long run.

Demonstrate reliability and initiative

If you want your boss to advocate for and champion your continued career growth, then demonstrating that you're reliable is crucial. So make it a point to regularly track and share your progress with your direct supervisor. There are two ways to do this, even better if you combine them. First, use digital tools like Trello or ClickUp to track your progress, and second, share updates on your status at your weekly or bi-weekly check-in meetings.

Exhibiting initiative will also stand you in good stead. Don't wait for tasks to be assigned to you. If you see an opportunity to contribute, speak up, either in team meetings or in your regular check-ins. Every time you do this, you show resourcefulness and an eagerness to engage, both positive characteristics for your continued success.

Seek feedback and professional development

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Feedback and continuous learning are essential in any working relationship, but even more so in a hybrid environment. “Out of sight” can quickly translate into “out of mind,” which means that feedback from your boss may not always be forthcoming. But it is essential to understand how you can improve. So ask for it. An easy opportunity is during your weekly or bi-weekly check-ins.

In much the same way, don’t wait for professional development opportunities to drop into your lap. Go looking for them. There is a plethora of online courses and webinars available, most fairly inexpensive. If you make it a point to share your learnings with your boss, not only will you show your commitment to continuous learning, but you will also get their support for additional learning opportunities.

Invest in building a personal connection

Nothing beats personal connections. But building them in a hybrid environment takes more work, so it is important to be strategic. Here are two ideas. First, understand your boss’s preferences. Pay attention to how they communicate. Do they prefer lengthy emails or quick messages? Adapt your communication style to match theirs.

Second, understand that informal catch-ups can help build rapport. Step outside your comfort zone and ask your boss to join you for coffee to learn more about them, either in-person (if it works) or virtually in a 15-minute coffee break.

Intentionally navigate challenges and conflicts

Despite some of the positives, the reduced face-to-face interactions that come with hybrid work can easily lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. If a message seems unclear or abrupt, don’t make assumptions. Instead, seek clarity by following up with a phone call. Above all, recognize that hybrid work is still evolving. So be open to changes and flexible in adapting to new methods or project directions.

Building a strong relationship with your boss in a hybrid environment is entirely possible. It just takes deliberate strategic effort.

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