

How to build a good working relationship with your new boss



In this series, manpower correspondent Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' Headstart newsletter.

Q My manager has been replaced by someone else. How do I hit it off with my new boss?

A As a starting point, trust is essential for a constructive relationship between managers and those they oversee, says Assistant Professor Shereen Fatimah of Singapore Management University.

"When there is trust between managers and employees, it increases their commitment and willingness to cooperate," says Prof Shereen, who studies topics such as motivation in the workplace.

Workers who wish to start this new working relationship on a good footing can begin with seeking to understand what is important to the new manager. This includes the strategic goals the manager is looking to achieve, changes the person has in mind to implement, and resource constraints.

Then, workers can propose suggestions that address these topics, says Prof Shereen.

"Keep in mind, however, to frame these suggestions using a positive tone – for example, as ideas for improvement or growth.

"When employees adopt a negative tone and present issues as problems or shortcomings, it paints the employee in an unfavourable light and increases the stress that managers experience."

When employees adopt a positive tone, Prof Shereen says, managers are more likely to be open to their suggestions and view them as competent and reliable members of their team – giving impetus for trust to develop over time.

Workers in this scenario should also be mindful of their blind spots. Changes are imminent with lea-



dership changes as new leaders would have an idea of which practices they find ineffective and how to change these.

But staff may resist the changes, finding themselves attached to the familiar way that things were done before, and thus develop negative perceptions of the new manager's intentions and actions, Prof Shereen says.

She adds that work relationships

can sour quickly when employees attribute negative traits to a person's behaviour, especially in new work relationships where they barely know each other.

"So, practise keeping an open mind to the changes that new managers aim to implement."

But all is not lost for those who feel the relationship has started off on an awkward footing, she says.

For new managers, it does not

have to be lonely at the top.

"Identify one or two employees with whom you have a constructive relationship and leverage their support to act as a bridge to communicate your objectives and intentions to others in the team.

"These employees have more legitimacy in the eyes of their peers and thus play a crucial role as linking pins," Prof Shereen suggests.

For their part, employees can

demonstrate their competence, thus cementing trust in new professional relationships, she says.

They can do so through improving their productivity and job performance, volunteering for an extra task, or learning a new skill that relates to any changes the new manager has in mind, for example.

Firms also have a role to play in facilitating a seamless transition, and a productive and amicable re-

lationship between a new boss and those he leads, Prof Shereen adds.

"Organisations should encourage new managers to adopt a short grace period where they first observe their department's workflow (and) practices before intervening with changes to improve those practices."

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