



Tips for Engaging a Disempowering Boss

Step 1: Let go of any expectations you may have of a particular outcome.

Your goal is not to change the boss; you have no guarantees about how he/she will respond. You may not be able to impact the final decision, but you can find ways to exert influence by sharing your perspective. The charge you will get from engaging your boss will not come from the results, but from the knowledge that you have honored and taken care of yourself. Focus on what you have control over -- your own behavior.

Step 2: Work through feelings to get to facts.

Fully experience your emotions about this situation. What are they trying to tell you? Write down what you know about how the boss's behavior impacts you. Then edit the phrases until each one is a piece of specific, neutral and accurate information.

Step 3: Clarify what is not working for you.

Envision one thing that could be different about the way you and your boss interact that would make the working relationship more productive. Clearly articulate one problem that you would like to solve.

Step 4: Observe and learn.

Watch your boss interacting with others. What types of people does he/she work well with? What techniques do they use to influence him/her? What works well and what doesn't?

Step 5: Shift the context with an unexpected phrase.

Using the Sample Phrases worksheet as a model, create several phrases you want to use in future conversations with your boss. The key to each phrase is to catch the manager's attention by using a phrase that is not what is expected. If he expects an argument, give him support. If she expects instant action, offer your opinion instead. Shift the context from decision-making to information-giving. Then use a concluding question to redirect the manager's response towards a mutual goal. Replay in your mind past conversations with your boss in which you felt disempowered. Envision yourself using one of the new phrases and how it makes a different result possible.

Step 6: Consider setting up a meeting with your boss to address key issues.

A good way to frame the invitation is: "One of my goals for the next six months is to improve the working relationship I have with you. I'd like to set up an appointment to discuss some specific areas I want to target. I'll need your input and your support. Do you have some time on Monday?"