

Using Emotional Intelligence to Message Up & Across

Marcia Hughes and James Terrell



Managing up or messaging up are goals frequently raised in executive coaching sessions. We add messaging across – that is to peers - to this imperative goal. Messaging up and across refers to intentionally and deliberately communicating well with your boss and those above your boss and with your peers. It is a deliberate effort to bring understanding and collaboration to relationships between people who may have different perspectives. The point is to convey respect by taking the time to communicate strategically. Remember your communication can be empathetic, compassionate, strategic and engaging all at once. In fact, this comprehensive packaging should be your goal.

If you are a CEO with a Board governing your organization, messaging up is vital. It's also vital if you are a team lead, reporting to your supervisor. In fact how we communicate with others throughout the organizational chart is essential to notice. We know communications with your direct reports is fundamental to your success; this article will focus on a different dimension of communications. It's a form that can be all too easy to miss when you get in the trance of accomplishing your every day list of tactical jobs. And that's why good interpersonal relationships with those in higher organizational positions and with your peers requires purposeful action.

The potent emotional intelligence skills triangle of Assertiveness, Empathy and Impulse Control is your key to success, especially if you pepper your engagement with Positive Mood (happiness and optimism). With **assertiveness** you first need to be assertive with yourself by doing whatever it takes to make sure you take the time for this engagement. Put it on your calendar, have lunch or coffee with a peer once a week, meet with your boss regularly give feedback and take a few minutes to ask about his/her life and talk about yours. Create a personal connection; it's the path to building trust. It's what it takes for people to want to "get your back" to help you out in times of challenge. It demonstrates engagement, loyalty, and commitment, but more importantly it makes your job more fun. Assertiveness includes the ability to communicate your perspective, to stand up for yourself and to say no when necessary.

Empathy and **impulse control** govern the effectiveness of your assertiveness. When you demonstrate empathy the recipient of your assertiveness feels that your communication is made with their best interests in mind. That makes all the difference in whether your suggestions are considered self serving or made with their best interests in mind. And you know that deeply influences the response to your

communication. Your skills in impulse control help you decide when to speak up, what tonality to use, and how to pace your engagement. Communicate with your peers with impatience and they will reciprocate – directly or indirectly.

Balance is your goal too little of any of these three skills can obviously get you in trouble. Note that too much of any of these can get you in a lot of trouble. Too much assertiveness feels like aggressiveness; too much empathy feels like the boundaries are failed; too much impulse control turns you into a risk adverse person missing opportunities.

Here are key steps you can follow to message up and across effectively:

- [Be intentional and purposeful
- [Don't confuse false humility with your poor communication if you don't speak up for yourself
- [Be aware of and respond to your different personality, communications styles, and conflict resolution styles
- [Acknowledge others
- [Be a team player
- [Let your peers know you value them
- [Be honest and trustworthy
- [Provide solutions, not problems
- [Request feedback, feedback, feedback – ask for it directly
- [Work with strengths and weaknesses – yours and theirs

Messaging up and across is a powerful tactic for getting more interesting work, more responsibility, and enjoying your engagement at work. Use it well and it can help you improve your work/life balance as it increases the ability to set boundaries and have those boundaries understood and supported.