



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 84: MARGARET LIPTAY – MANAGING UP, REDEFINED – PART 1

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. Well, one of the top priorities for many professionals is cultivating a positive relationship with the boss or direct supervisor. Doing so is often referred to as managing up or communicating up. Managing up often entails learning about the boss's habits, such as which channel he prefers for communication or when she prefers to hold weekly meetings. Our guest on the podcast today has a different take on managing up rather than seeing the relationship as a supervisor-subordinate dynamic. Leadership coach Margaret Liptay recommends a different approach, one that's more complementary and reciprocal and one that leads to results thanks to a one plus one equals three model. This week we share Part 1 of our conversation with leadership coach Margaret Liptay on how managing your relationships can create results and growth for everyone involved.

Ken White

Well, Margaret, thanks for taking the time to join us. It's always great to see you. And as we were talking right before, we recorded your way up there in the favorite guest category. I think this is your third time on the podcast, so welcome back.

Margaret Liptay

Thank you, Ken. I am so happy to be here. And this is my favorite place to be, without a doubt. Thank you.

Ken White

We're going to have to check your number of downloads to make sure because if it's up there, we'll keep bringing you back. But you have such an interesting job. You're constantly meeting with companies and leaders, and that's why we love to have you back because of what you hear, what you learn, and what you're teaching. So thanks for taking the time to be with us today.

Margaret Liptay

You're very welcome.

Ken White

So you and I have been talking right before we started to record, and we're going to devote the podcast today to managing up. What does that mean to you in today's work environment?

Margaret Liptay

Well, Ken, managing up, I believe, in today's work environment has a slightly different connotation than it may have had in the past. In the past, I think people looked at it as some kind of a one on one communication or dialogue with one person within their organization. And I come out of 2017 from a very different perspective, and here's how I look at managing up. You've really got to look at a bigger picture than just a single one-on-one relationship. First of all, the way the world operates today in corporate America, everyone has a responsibility for results, goals, growth. So that's number one. Number two, you have to manage yourself in your own energy. You have to manage your clients internal and external. You have to manage your managers. And I use the plural, and I'll get back to that in a moment. And again, you also have to manage people that report directly to you, indirectly to you, on your team, on your project. There aren't all these direct lines as there used to be. It's a much more amorphous environment out there. And I also think that you have to manage every project, every request every commitment to perfection. We live in a global world now. So the communication has to be spot on. Rework is not acceptable. It also means that rather than being preoccupied with your image or you are seeking to go up the ladder. You've got to be in the moment. You've got to live in the present. So if you look at the goals of the firm, you look at all the constituencies that you have to appeal to. You look at your managers, and we'll talk about that. Then I think it's clear to me that this concept of this one linear relationship between you and your manager isn't exactly the new model. It's not the 2017 and going forward, model. You have to manage lots of relationships. And that's the bottom line. Now getting to the part about managing your manager in a plural. My experience, and it's coming up more and more lately that in most organizations now, while they have a hierarchy, the hierarchy is a blend. It's a matrix management and a direct line management philosophy. So at any given time, depending on what the project is or the expected outcome is, you could have a functional manager. You can have a geography manager. You could have a manager who's a product line manager. You could have an overarching manager. So in a matrix organization, sometimes you wonder who your manager is.

Ken White

No doubt.

Margaret Liptay

You know it's a tricky situation, so you either wonder who it is or you know you have too many. So you've got to manage that. So you've got to manage the relationship with each and every one of those managers. So what I'd like to spend a little time on is understanding that goals, outcomes are essential. Understanding that everybody that you come in contact with, whether it's your direct report or not. Whether it's a person who's on your team. Whether it's another manager, they're all important. And so, what I'm going to suggest is some outlines as to how to manage your manager, but all of the tips I'm hoping to give today will be applicable to every relationship you have.

Ken White

Sure.

Margaret Liptay

And then the ideal would be that that would become natural.

Ken White

And transferable.

Margaret Liptay

Exactly.

Ken White

Right. So where does the managing my manager fit into it? How do you approach?

Margaret Liptay

Well, the managing my manager actually is a pretty big part of it because, let's face it, most people are ambitious and want to move up in the organization, and they do have to look for sponsors. They do have to look for people within the organization who will help them. It may be your direct manager. It may not be your direct manager, but it is someone that will get to know you either through a project through teamwork in some fashion. So let's face it you have to build relationship with those sponsors in service of your own career, and in doing so, the more managers you get to know, and maybe we call it networking. I call it, you know, finding and mining sponsors. You go, and you find people who will get to know you, see your work, help you with your work, help you grow, and be a person who, at the end of the day, will speak up for you and in having some conversations with some firm and one, in particular, came up. At Google, the engineering department has a philosophy around promotions which is when they get together all the information and packets on all the people that are being considered for promotion. They bring in all the managers of those people, and a presentation is made about each and

every one of the individuals who are being considered for promotion. However, the person's manager does not get a vote. So what's interesting about that, and I think more the new model is they want to know how you have really influenced through your relationships other people, and it kind of eliminates that age-old, you know, teacher's pet or a manager's pet. It takes that right out of it. Now I thought that was very fascinating. What an interesting way to do it but also myself coming out of the professional services industry. What happens now is most promotions are considered by committee. There isn't just one manager making the decision about where your career is going. It's a panel of people. It could be your internal coach. It could be your manager. It could be someone you have a dotted line to. It could be someone in another department that you did some work for. So I think what we're seeing is this concept of my manager, and I it's not a reality anymore. But yet those relationships. And that's why I say managing your managers is so important. But you can't also avoid or ignore is a, better way to put it, the people that support you because actually, they have a lot of power too because many times they're asked how are you doing.

Ken White

Sure.

Margaret Liptay

How do you behave? What's your work product? What does it look like? Do they steal your thunder, or do they give you praise? So those are the kind of things.

Ken White

And then, if you're only trying to please your direct boss, you're not making much of an impact on the organization. Right. So you've got to reach out. You've got to branch out.

Margaret Liptay

Exactly.

Ken White

Everybody wins in that sort of way.

Margaret Liptay

Exactly. And let's face it, bosses come and go. Managers come and go. They get transferred. They don't take you with them.

Ken White

Right.

Margaret Liptay

They leave the firm. They go somewhere else. They maybe get fired. And if you have an affiliation with just one person in a firm, sometimes their bad news is your bad news. They disappear, you disappear. So the more that you and I don't mean to suggest this in a manipulative way at all. This is not calculating. This is not manipulative. This is not, you know, kissing up to anyone. This has to become a natural behavior where you realize it's a reciprocal relationship. You need each other, and your manager need you.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Margaret Liptay in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary. The Center for Corporate Education can help you and your organization reach your goals with a leadership development program specifically designed for your organization and delivered by our world-class business school faculty. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with leadership coach Margaret Liptay.

Margaret Liptay

So I'd like to go through the little pence if you want to say or what I think is the process. But I'd like to do is kind of to reframe the definition of the manager-to-manager or manager's relationship. Your manager is not your organizational parent. Your manager is not your college professor. Your manager is not your buddy. Your manager is not an all-being, all-knowing, all-perfect person. Your manager is a human being. You, on the other hand, are not a child, are not a student, are not a subordinate. You might defer, but you don't have to in every sense be subordinate, and you are not a person who is powerless, and there will be times when you will be the teacher, you will be the matter expert, you'll be the one with the most knowledge in the room, and you'll have an obligation to present that information and that knowledge to your manager. So I'm trying to reframe it so that we have a relationship between a manager and the person managed. That is what I would call synergistic, and I love this concept because, to me, synergy is one plus one is three. What that means is neither one of you could be successful or achieve what you achieve unless you join up together. The power of the two of you is much better than each of you as individuals.

Ken White

Sure.

Margaret Liptay

One plus one is three. So if you approach a relationship with your manager with the people that are direct lines dotted lines, whatever way you are interrelating with them. If you look at it from the point of view of synergy, What do you bring to them? What are

they bringing to you so that you get to the overarching results of the firm? And in any relationship, it's fluid. Sometimes your managers the student or the nonexpert, and you're providing information to him or her. And I'm sure that's appreciated. And so it's a very fluid relationship building and complementary synergistic energetic there's so much that can be gained by going approaching it, in my opinion, in that in that fashion.

Ken White

With just with that, the mindset of this I'm not the subordinate, and that's not my boss. That's tough for a lot of people. A lot of people like that. I think I meet professionals who prefer that. But you've got to change it if you're going to make an impact on the organization.

Margaret Liptay

Exactly. And quite frankly, a lot of managers like to be superior.

Ken White

Right.

Margaret Liptay

They think they are. But if you could really adapt that mindset to your thinking, then you exceed and certainly reach the goals of the firm. You increase your ability to learn. You accelerate your career because you are in a position of being more powerful than you were by yourself.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

So it's really creating power within two people so that your manager fulfills his dreams and aspirations at the same time, your career gets accelerated without you having to be calculating and manipulative and mindful every moment about where you're going and how you're getting there. You'll just get there.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

Be in the present moment. Think about the synergy that you're you're providing, and it'll take care of itself.

Ken White

And remember that one plus one equals three if it's done right.

Margaret Liptay

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Ken White

Interesting.

Margaret Liptay

So here are just some tips, you know, because the questions I usually get from the people I coach and the individuals I speak to is also how do I do it. You know it sounds great. I love the idea, but how do I do it? And again, these are applicable to almost any relationship, but it's worth mentioning. So, for example, you need to understand your manager's goals, motivations, aspirations. You need to know your manager both professionally and personally. You need to know what their triggers are. You need to know what their energy is when they're low and when they're high. You do need to know a lot about how they like to work. Do they want data? Do they not want data? Do they want all the information in an encyclopedia or do they just want give me the top line? Do they want to communicate? And you mentioned it earlier. It is important to know do they want email. Do they want text? Do they want you know a written communicate of some kind? Do they want a phone call? Do they want a face-to-face meeting? And that could change. But you know how you're going to find out what they want. You ask them.

Ken White

Absolutely.

Margaret Liptay

And that's where you begin.

Ken White

Absolutely.

Margaret Liptay

You begin by asking questions, and you ask permission to ask questions. You know, I know some people get intimidated by going to their boss and asking a question.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

Well, bosses are not, you know, psychics. They don't know what's on your mind. They want to get to know you because that's actually an obligation they have as well. So if you garner a small amount of your manager's time and say, can we just discuss how you work and I'd like to share with you how I work so that we can create synergy together so that we don't overlap we don't duplicate we use our energy correctly. I would love that if someone came to me with that premise.

Ken White

Absolutely.

Margaret Liptay

Wouldn't you?

Ken White

Absolutely. Yeah. And I hear, and I hear it from leaders, you know that sometimes they burn out towards the end of the day. They burn out towards the end of the week, or they're getting emails filled with information. They don't want any of that. So obviously, yes, know your manager and start out by asking.

Margaret Liptay

Yeah, and it's subtle. You don't go and talk to your manager about what your goals are and how quickly you want to be promoted, and how quickly you want to become a vice president. And how quickly you want to get rich. That's really not the best approach. You want to hear about him or her what their style is, and then you need to adjust your style accordingly while keeping your own authenticity as well. But you need to be a good leader. You need to solve problems then inform. What I hear what is, and I'm sure you've read the HBR article about managing the monkey. I hear a lot of people say well, I go to my boss, and I tell him what's going on, and I don't know what happens after that. You know he doesn't seem to respond to me. Well, I say don't go to your boss unless you have to for advice. Go to your boss, tell him what you did and ask him if he agrees with what you did. If he doesn't, okay, or she doesn't. Fine. You can go and do something else. But I think where we lose a lot of time, and a lot of momentum in our relationships with managers is that we go there expecting to be a little bit of that child, a little bit of that student rather than saying, you know what, I'm the expert. I'm going to help you this time. And tell me where I went wrong. So it's also a teaching moment for the manager. So you know, don't put the monkey on your manager's back. You own the monkey.

Ken White

But also for the manager, the manager in your framework has to understand I'm not the end all be all either.

Margaret Liptay

Exactly.

Ken White

They've got to both parties have to play into this.

Margaret Liptay

Exactly and you have to be sensitive to the fact that the manager has other responsibilities beside you.

Ken White

Right.

Margaret Liptay

You were hired for a reason. You were hired because you have talent. So but another suggestion speaking of talent that I would make is don't let your talent hijack you. And by that, I mean sometimes people feel that they are so good and so passionate about what they're doing. They kind of run everybody over, including their boss, and they want to make sure that their boss knows you know how talented they are and how much they did and what they achieved. I think a more subtle approach is better. Just do the work, live in the moment, and the future will take care of itself. Don't run to your boss every time you've done something that you just you think you deserve a pat on the back for. Their time will come when you can have that discussion. So keep the monkey, do the work, live in the moment, enjoy the present and enjoy being in the present. You know, that's another thing we get very hung up on. We have to move up. We have to move up. There are times when being in the present and having a position in the present is the most critical job in the business. So there's nothing wrong with just being and enjoying who you are in the present and doing a fabulous job and getting lots of attention and lots of kudos for that.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

I mean, there's just nothing wrong with that at all. But I think high potentials and very talented people feel that there's an expectation on them of their managers, and they go full steam ahead, and while they're doing that, they're actually burning out.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

And then they crash and burn.

Ken White

Well, that's part one of our conversation with Margaret Liptay on managing up. We'll share the second half of our discussion next week on the podcast. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you, and your organization meet and exceed your goals with business and leadership development programs that specifically fit your needs and get results. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education for you or your organization, visit our website wmleadership.com. Finally, if you have a suggestion or comment pertaining to our podcast, we'd love to hear from you. Please connect with us via email. Our address is podcast@wm.edu. Thanks to our guest this week, Margaret Liptay, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.