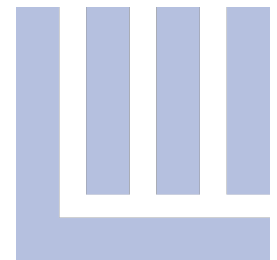


# Managing Up: Tips for Improving Workplace Relationships with Supervisors (aka “the Boss”)

North Carolina Paralegal Association

Annual Meeting | New Bern, NC

March 31, 2023



# Disclaimers

Boss | Supervisor | Manager

Company | Law Firm | Organization

Staff Supervisor | Paralegal Leader

Don't forget the Rules and Ethics

Embedded handouts

# What does it mean?

- To learn about your supervisor's habits, strengths, weaknesses
- To anticipate their needs.
- Providing help with their work tasks when necessary and being honest about their professional capabilities or career aspirations.
- Managing up is when a direct report, through a positive relationship, is able to make the job of their supervisor easier.
- It's all about creating value for your boss/supervising attorney/staff supervisor. And in turn, they guide you to be the best employee possible.
- Every relationship, even one defined by power, is still a relationship. It demands input from both parties and a healthy degree of give-and-take. In this case, the boss manages, and the staff member manages up.



# Why is it important?

- **Fosters strong relationships between you and a new supervisor:** If you recently started work at another firm or received a new supervisor at your current workplace, managing up is an important method to get to know your new supervisor and how to work with them effectively. It also helps you develop important questions to ask in your initial meeting with them about their expectations and management style.
- **Enhances communication and productivity through mutual understanding:** By taking the time to get to know your supervisor, their personal interests, personality and professional experiences, you have the opportunity to communicate with them in a way they understand. This prevents miscommunication and allows you to maximize your productivity at your job.
- **Allows you to learn and take on new job tasks:** Managing up includes being proactive and asking your supervisor to take on additional tasks or to help them manage their workload. This helps you learn about different roles in the workplace and allows you to learn new technical or interpersonal skills.
- **Encourages you to take control of your job and career goals:** Instead of relying on your supervisor to enforce productivity and professional goals, managing up encourages you to speak with your supervisor about the things you want to achieve in your current job and career. This allows you to gain confidence in yourself and helps your supervisor learn about what motivates you.
- **Provides an example for your coworkers:** When you aim to assist your supervisor, connect with them and speak with them about your needs, you encourage those around you it's okay to do the same. By encouraging your coworkers to manage up, you can promote productivity and communication across the entire department. (A side of leadership.)

# How does it work?



Ever experienced one of those super-efficient executive assistants (EA) who seems to have more power than the boss? Here's an EA who knows what's important to the leader and how to manage their calendar so that the boss gets to focus.



The EA may not have the title, but they wield influence by ensuring the boss's success. This is one version of how managing up works. In this case, the EA is the gatekeeper who allows access to the boss and prioritizes the boss's success over everyone else's.



For most people, managing up doesn't involve being so fully enmeshed in the details of the leader's life (they probably wouldn't welcome that). However, understanding what matters to your higher-up and orienting toward what helps them succeed should guide your approach for managing up.

# Benefits of Managing Up in the Workplace

There are direct benefits related to performance reviews, promotions, and opportunities. There are also indirect ones related to team performance, keeping projects properly resourced and on schedule, better-working relationships, and reduced stress.

For many employees, your personal performance reviews determine:

- Your rate of progress
- Whether you achieve an increase in salary
- Your measurement of value to the organization
- Managing up contributes to strong performance reviews, receiving a promotion, and a win-win for you and your boss. And so, learning to master managing up means that your own progression is that much more attainable.

The second benefit comes from making yourself into your boss's right-hand person (used in the generic sense). Few people are indispensable these days. If you can build the reputation of being your boss's go-to, your boss will have your back or bring you to the next big opportunity.

Often, female employees are taught to let their work speak for itself. Yet part of the managing up process is to let your boss know where you've been successful and what you've been managing.

- Being clear about where you made a solid contribution and demonstrated your effectiveness makes your boss look good.
- This isn't about being boastful, but rather about ensuring that your boss knows who you are and the value you are delivering, to them and the organization.

# Managing Up When Your Relationship with Your Boss is Not Strong

- It's often referenced that an employee doesn't leave an organization — they leave their boss. This is a rather sobering statistic for supervisors out there.
  - Not everyone has the luxury of leaving an organization in these financially tight times. Or, if you see a future in the organization despite your boss, it may mean sticking it out and getting the best results from your current position.
- While we hope that our boss will take an interest in your learning style, they're often too busy. So adapting your communication style to your boss's style is often a strategic move.
  - If it's concise headlines he/she is after, rather than delving into the detail, then keep feedback crisp and clear.
- Virtual working is likely to make the relationship with your boss that much harder and more difficult to manage. How exactly are you supposed to interpret those non-verbals when half of the time you're both off-camera?
  - Get clear on the boss's expectations and deliverables—even more important with remote and hybrid work environments.



# Managing Up and Understanding Your Boss

Most employees feel somewhat intimidated by the idea of managing up, particularly with a senior boss or difficult boss. This is the time to put on your investigative or research hat and get curious about the world from their perspective. It sounds like a cliché, but the foundational question of, “What’s in it for them?” will serve you well in this relationship too. Getting into the boss’s shoes and viewing the world a little from their perspective can begin to answer critical questions.

Questions to ask yourself (or your supervisor) include:

- What is top-of-mind right now at the firm or in the practice group?
- How is their performance measured — what targets need to be met this quarter?
- What would make their lives easier?
- What keeps them awake at night?
- How would they like to be supported?
- What's their definition of success?
- What do they consider urgent versus non-urgent? Deadlines? Soft deadlines?
- How would they prefer to receive feedback or general information? In-person, an email or text, over the phone, or during a video call?

Whether it’s [Gallup’s Strengths Finder](#) or [the Enneagram](#), see if your boss will share key insights about their working style and preferences. This will go a long way to explaining their behaviors and giving you an idea of their preferences.

**You don’t have to love your boss to get along effectively. Reaching out can be tricky. But try asking a couple of rapport-building questions, such as those mentioned above. It will go a long way in building a relationship with them.**



# How to Manage Up at Work

**1. Know what's important to your boss and what their goals are for the department/team/group.**

**2. Ask questions.**

- Timing is critical, so look for a gap when they aren't particularly hurried or stressed.
- Questions you can ask to help you manage up include:
  - What's their workday like?
  - What are they worried about?
  - What's overwhelming them right now?
  - What could they use help with?
  - How do your goals support theirs?
  - What else can I help with?
  - Try to use your one-on-ones or staff meetings to pose these questions.

**3. Develop empathy as a leadership skill**

- It may be difficult to imagine feeling empathy for your boss, but like everyone else, they're simply human.
- We can try to view the world from their shoes and empathize with the stress and constraints they face. A simple reflection of, "I can imagine today must be a very stressful day," can go a long way to building a sense of rapport.

# How to Manage Up at Work

## 4. Give early warning of potential problems

- None of us likes to be the bearer of bad tidings, and the last thing you want to do is go running to the boss at the first sign of trouble. But the average boss wants due warning that trouble is brewing. No one likes these kinds of surprises.
  - When you know you may miss a deadline, provide an early heads-up. This action allows intervention at a critical point, and then you can give a full debrief after the trouble is over. At the moment of urgently needing to communicate bad news, keep it short and factual, assigning as little blame as possible.

## 5. Anticipate their likely response

- Having observed your boss in action for a period of time, you know how they'll respond. If you have the explosive type, anticipate the inevitable eruption.
- Remember that they're likely reacting to the situation rather than to you personally.
- Provide the time and space to cool off and have your next steps ready as to how you are going to assist in containing the situation. Alternatively, if your boss is one who needs time to think things over, provide that space before volunteering possible solutions.

## 6. Keep a paper trail

- In the flurry of virtual communication these days, actions can get lost in translation.
- Note everything that you are communicating with your boss by phone or on Zoom/Teams in a succinct email summary or project note. Email communication allows your boss the option to respond hours later when they have the gap rather than when you drafted your request.

# How to Manage Up at Work

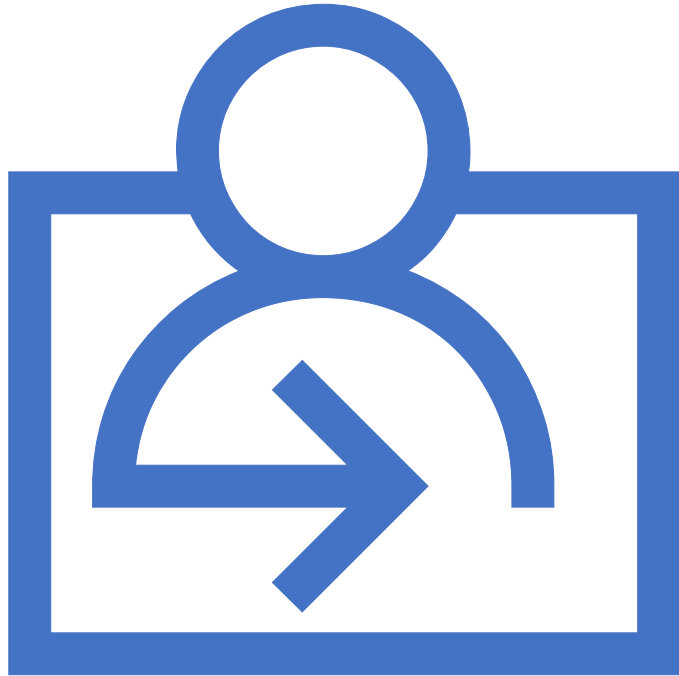
## **7. Know when your boss is most responsive. (The circadian rhythm.)**

- Know when your boss's prime time is. If they're an early bird and at their desk early, then chances are they're best able to respond to issues earlier in the day.
- If, on the other hand, they seem to be an owl and send nocturnal emails, it's probably fine to shoot them a late-night email, even if you don't get an immediate response.
- Determine whether they have key focus periods marked out in their calendar for strategic work and try not to interrupt those. Maintaining a good working relationship with their executive assistant can go some way to determining what mood the boss is in and whether it is a good time to engage.

## **8. Be a team barometer**

- Often, the boss is too busy to get into the details and is removed from how the team is coping.
- If you notice that tensions are running high or that certain members are burning the midnight oil, let your boss know. Make suggestions for how the load could be more evenly distributed. (Ask advice from trusted colleagues.)
- Each of these tips needs careful thought and positioning. Ultimately what you seek is to combine the best of you with the best of your boss to drive the success you are both seeking.

# Strategies to Effectively Managing Up at Work



1. Anticipate your supervisor's needs.
2. Understand how your supervisor prefers to communicate.
3. Identify how your supervisor likes information presented.
4. Offer to take on more responsibility for organizing meetings.
5. Coordinate logistics after meetings.
6. Volunteer for time-consuming tasks.
7. Alert your supervisor of potential risks and problems.
8. Create your own to-do list.
9. Become a consistent source of help.
10. Be solutions-oriented.

# When to Use It

Frequently absent  
from the office

Overwhelmed with  
work, themselves

Brand-new and  
someone you've  
never met before

Someone you don't  
work with directly  
because they work  
in a remote location

Indecisive or  
someone who gives  
conflicting  
messages

# Tips for Being an Effective Employee and Achieving Success

Striving to be an effective employee can have a number of benefits for both your own professional life and the firm you work for. No matter what job title you hold, you can always work to improve upon your skills and contribution to your workplace. The following are a few ways in which you can be the most effective employee when you report to someone else:

## **Continue learning**

- When you first start a new job, you are probably willing to learn whatever is necessary to be successful in your position. However, as you continue working and receive a heavier workload, you may have less time to devote to learning about your role and place within the company. Making it a priority for ongoing education within your position can help you consistently improve upon your skills, increase work output and keep your duties interesting on a day-to-day basis.

## **Prioritize professionalism**

- Acting in a professional way when at work can help you earn the respect of your supervisors and remain effective at your job. Examples of professionalism within the workplace include arriving at work on time or early every day, following the dress code and refraining from gossip. The more professional you are, the more your employer will trust and respect you.

## **Work hard**

- Being a productive and respected employee requires hard work every day. This means you arrive ready to give your work your full attention and you strive to complete the tasks assigned to you in an efficient manner. To demonstrate your work ethic, try to assist other team members when you finish your duties, and ask questions when you need clarification to show you're listening and understand your objectives.

## **Limit distractions**

- There are countless distractions in today's workplace, from cellphones to email to social media. Shutting off your phone or keeping it on silent and avoiding distractions while on the job is an important part of being the best employee possible. If you use a computer, try to keep open only website tabs that you are currently using.

# Communication

Communication skills are vital to a healthy, efficient workplace. Often categorized as a soft skill or an interpersonal skill, communication is the act of sharing information from one person to another person or group of people.

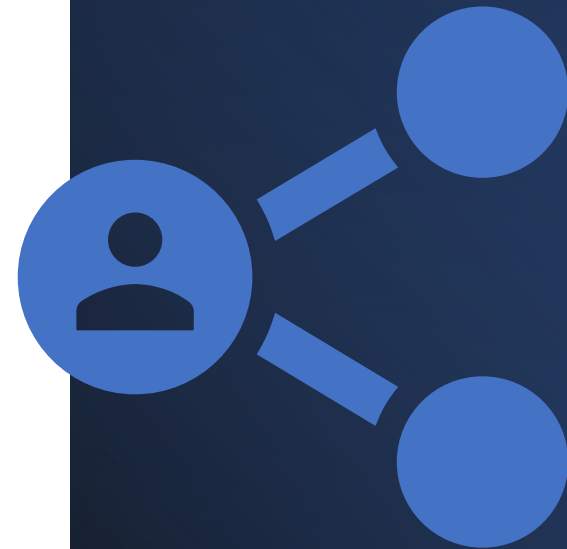
There are many different ways to communicate, each of which plays an important role in sharing information.





# The Importance of Communication

- We use communication every day in nearly every environment, including in the workplace. Whether you give a slight head nod in agreement or present information to a large group, communication is absolutely necessary when building relationships, sharing ideas, delegating responsibilities, managing a team and much more.
- Learning and developing good communication skills can help you succeed in your career, make you a competitive job candidate and build your network. While it takes time and practice, communication and interpersonal skills are certainly able to be both increased and refined.
- There are four main types of communication we use on a daily basis: verbal, nonverbal, written and visual.
- With all of these communication styles, it's most effective when you know how to actively listen, observe and empathize. Developing these soft skills can help you better understand a message and respond thoughtfully.



## Types of Communication and Ways to Use Them



### Verbal

- Use a strong, confident speaking voice.
- Use active listening.
- Avoid filler words.
- Avoid industry jargon when appropriate.



### Nonverbal

- Notice how your emotions feel physically.
- Be intentional about your nonverbal communications.
- Mimic nonverbal communications you find effective.



### Visual

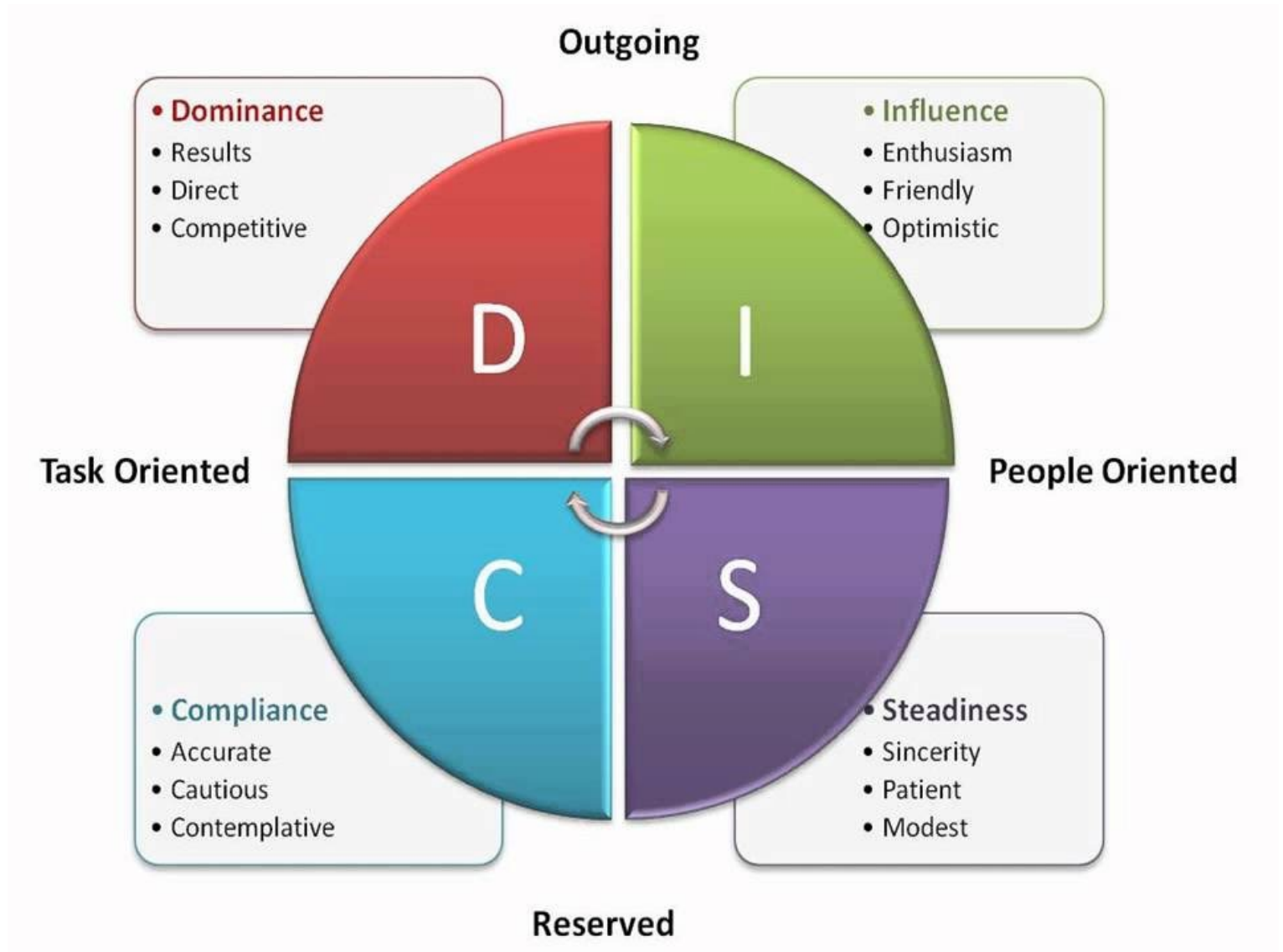
- Ask others before including visuals.
- Consider your audience.
- Only use visuals if they add value.
- Make them clear and easy-to-understand.



### Written

- Strive for simplicity.
- Don't rely on tone.
- Take time to review your written communications.
- Keep a file of writing you find effective or enjoyable.

# Communication Styles





# Tips to Demonstrate Your Work Ethic

While work ethic can be defined in many ways, it is a concept that involves having various workplace skills including dedication and responsibility.

Doing your job with a strong work ethic can help you perform tasks better, form stronger relationships with colleagues and develop a positive image for future promotions.

# What is Work Ethic?

- Work ethic is a combination of several moral principles based on the idea that hard work is fundamentally valuable and worth pursuing. If you have a strong work ethic, you likely possess other traits such as dependability, respectfulness, productivity and collaboration, among others.
- For example, if you find work important and worthy of your best efforts, you will do things like show up for work on time and complete tasks by their due date. There are many ways you can demonstrate a strong work ethic, but mostly this is done by paying attention to small things throughout the day like being punctual or communicating well.



# Why is it Important?

- Having and demonstrating a strong work ethic is important because it can help you quickly achieve career goals. When you possess these skills, you will likely perform quality work, have strong relationships with colleagues and work towards achieving important tasks that add value to your organization. These accomplishments will lead to favorable reviews at work along with strong references and recommendations. Showing that you are a reliable employee will also lead to more responsibilities and opportunities—for example, work ethic is necessary for leadership roles.
- All of these factors can lead to better chances at a raise or promotion and accomplishing major long and short-term career goals. Displaying a strong work ethic can result in you being seen as a highly valuable team member, which can lead to beneficial advances in your career like a raise, promotion or management position.

## Ways to Demonstrate Work Ethic

1

Put away things that might distract from your work, such as your cell phone.

2

Ask trusted colleagues or mentors to help you identify areas for improvement and set SMART goals.

3

Spend your time wisely on tasks that align with your goals and prioritize tasks by impact.

4

Organize your notes, email inbox, and workspaces for increased focus, motivation and time management.

5

Take breaks throughout the day and practice a healthy work/life balance to avoid burnout.

6

Identify aspects of your work that motivate you such as tasks, goals or colleagues.

7

Practice time management to complete quality, on-time work and to be more present during meetings.



# How to Demonstrate and Improve Your Work Ethic

Demonstrating your work ethic often simply means doing small things each day that make you a better teammate to your colleagues, clients and supervisors. Here are several tips you might consider when improving your work ethic:

- **Minimize distractions.** To demonstrate your discipline, it can be helpful to put away things that might hinder or distract from your work. For example, if you find yourself checking your cell phone regularly, you might put it away in your desk drawer.
- **Set goals.** It can be helpful to focus on improving one or two work ethic qualities at a time. To do so, ask trusted colleagues or mentors to help you identify some areas for improvement. Start with these areas and try applying the [SMART goal](#) framework for specific, measurable goals.
- **Take notice of how you spend your time.** During a workweek, pay close attention to what takes up your time. You might notice that you tend to get on social media sites in the afternoon, for example. While sometimes taking a short break can be helpful and lead to more productivity, you should be mindful of being distracted for long periods of time.
- **Stay organized.** Take some time to organize your notes, email inbox, desk and any other workspaces. This can help keep you focus and create a simple, more relaxing workday. It can also contribute to better time management skills.
- **Practice balance.** To have and maintain a strong work ethic, it is important that you take breaks and have a healthy work/life balance. Working until you are burned out can decrease productivity and effectively reduce your work ethic. Take regular time off and schedule breaks throughout your workday.
- **Believe in what you're working on.** Feeling excited about your company's mission, the work you are doing or some other aspect of your job can help increase your work ethic. If you find that completing tasks in a certain way makes it more exciting for you, like collaborating with teammates, try to incorporate more of that into your workday. Look for aspects of your work that you are naturally drawn to and focus on those.
- **Manage your time wisely.** Being on time and completing tasks by (or preferably before) due dates is an easy and obvious way to show work ethic. It also sets you up for success. You will be less likely to make mistakes due to rushing and you can be more present and active during meetings when you do not feel exasperated from hurrying.
  - Make it a point to be at work when it is expected of you. For example, if you are expected to be at work from 9 am to 5 pm, you should be available during these times. If you are not able to be working during this time, let your supervisor know as early as possible with an acceptable excuse, such as a doctor's appointment or a family emergency.



# Why should you ask your supervisor questions?

Asking questions to your supervisor offers several benefits. It can help you get valuable feedback on your work, which can give you a better understanding of your work and can give you useful ideas from your supervisor. You can also gain important information that may not be passed through formal communication channels.

Here are some additional benefits that you can gain from maintaining active communication with your supervisor:

- You can find out to what extent you have achieved your performance goals.
- You can find out ways to grow professionally and increase your chances of a promotion or pay raise.
- You can understand what your supervisor expects from you.
- You can improve your relationship with your supervisor.
- Your supervisor can address any specific issues you may have at your workplace.
- Your supervisor gets to know what motivates you better.
- It makes your supervisor feel important.
- It shows your supervisor that you take your job seriously.
- It allows you to show your knowledge and expertise to your supervisor.

# Questions to Help You Understand Your Job Expectations

It is important to know what your employer expects from you. When you want to find out if you are progressing well or if you need to make some changes, you can do so by asking the following questions:

- *What are my strongest skills? What can I improve?*
- *Can you tell me more about your management style?*
- *What is one thing I am doing well and why?*
- *Do I need to change something? Why and how?*
- *Is there something I could be doing differently?*
- *How would you like me to provide feedback? Do you want me to follow any specific method or format?*
- *Which areas do you think I should be working harder on?*
- *What achievements of your team you are most proud of?*
- *How can I help you save time or make your job easier?*
- *Where do you see the company two years from now? How can I help you in achieving that vision?*
- *What are the biggest challenges for the team in the near future? How can we better prepare for those challenges?*

# Questions to Understand Your Supervisor's Priorities

To make sure you are working productively and focusing on the right projects, find out what your supervisor considers the top priorities in your organization.

You can learn more about these priorities by asking the following questions:

- *Which goals should we focus on first?*
- *What are our low-priority tasks right now? Are there any ways we can streamline them?*
- *Is there anything you would like me to know about you, the company or the team?*
- *Would you like to share any higher-level issues about this project?*

# Questions to Show Support for Your Supervisor

It creates more happiness at work if your supervisors know that you are always ready to help and support them.

Here are the questions you can ask to demonstrate your willingness to contribute:

- *What can I help you with?*
- *What makes you worry most about the company or the team?*
- *Is there anything you would like to achieve shortly? How can I contribute?*
- *What is your biggest challenge as a supervisor? How can I support you in overcoming that challenge?*

Base your questions on the existing situation and stage of work. Develop your own questions about specific issues and opportunities at your workplace.

# Parting Wisdom from Leaders

## ***Know your boss's priorities and goals.***

*When you know his/her priorities, you can tailor the information you share during meetings and conversations with them. And when you are able to assist your supervisor in accomplishing his/her goals, you are demonstrating you are dependable and take initiative; two highly coveted traits supervisors look for in their employees.*

## ***Anticipate the needs of your supervisor.***

*The more you anticipate the needs and demonstrate your understanding of them, the more confidence and influence you will build with your supervisor.*

## ***Talk like your supervisor.***

*Use the language and terms that he or she often uses and focus on the topics that are most important to him/her.*

And how do you get to know their priorities, needs, and language they use? By spending time with them. Work to get time on their calendar and communicate regularly with them to build rapport and empathy for them. However, walking in your supervisor's shoes is just one part of successfully managing up. **It's also important that you get what you need.**

# Parting Wisdom from Leaders

***Don't bring any surprises to your supervisor.*** No supervisor likes surprises, especially negative ones. Keep your supervisor updated with current news that is significant to his or her success.

***Understand your supervisor's strengths and weaknesses.*** Why is this so important? Because you want to be able to close the gap of his/her weaknesses, and leverage and learn from his/her strengths. It will also help you to anticipate how he/she will act in certain situations. For instance, if they are highly goal driven and you bring them a roadblock to accomplishing a goal, they will want to know when and how you will get around it.

***Offer solutions.*** Supervisors don't want to hear all the problems you have. Rather, they want to hear the various solutions you can offer to a problem. It is important that you have your own opinion on which one would be the best alternative. This demonstrates that you have carefully thought through the situation and didn't jump to your first idea. Whatever the challenge you are having with your boss, make sure you keep communications open.

If they are a true leader (or one in the making), they will appreciate you making the effort to reinforce and strengthen your relationship.



# Errors and Mistakes: Responsibilities when a mistake is discovered



2015 FEO 4



Duty to Report to  
malpractice carrier.

## Errors and Mistakes

**Rule 5.3:** Partners and other lawyers with supervisory authority over nonlawyer staff have an ethical obligation to make sure that nonlawyers' conduct is compatible with the professional obligation of the lawyer.

If partner or supervisory lawyer knows of conduct by nonlawyer staff that violates the Rules of Professional conduct and fails to take action at a time when consequences can be avoided, that lawyer violates Rule 5.3.

Q & A

The image features three-dimensional, light blue characters: a capital letter 'Q', an ampersand '&', and a capital letter 'A'. These characters are rendered with a smooth, matte finish and are positioned on a highly reflective, light-colored surface. The lighting is soft and directional, coming from the upper left, which creates subtle shadows and highlights the three-dimensional form of each character. The background is a plain, light blue gradient, and the overall composition is clean and minimalist.

# Contact + Connect

Julie D. Beavers | Director of Client Services

[julie@lawyersmutualinc.com](mailto:julie@lawyersmutualinc.com)

[www.lawyersmutualinc.com](http://www.lawyersmutualinc.com)



# Managing Up Quick Tips

## **1. Anticipate your supervisor's needs**

- Observe your supervisor's routines, strengths, and weaknesses. Notice areas in which they struggle or routinely have to rush to complete something. As you observe, you'll likely begin to notice patterns and then be able to anticipate their needs and volunteer to handle certain responsibilities before they become a problem.

## **2. Understand how your supervisor prefers to communicate**

- Identify how your supervisor prefers to communicate: face-to-face, via email, text, instant message, or over the phone. If you can't determine this by observing, you can also ask. For example, when your supervisor asks you to let them know something, ask how they would prefer to get the information. You could ask, "Do you want me to schedule a time on your calendar to discuss it or would you rather I email you?" Their response will help you gauge their preferred method of communication. It can also help to monitor how other people in your office communicate with your supervisor.

## **3. Identify how your supervisor likes information presented**

- Become an expert in delivering information to your supervisor. Some things you'll want to identify, for example, are whether they like the main message delivered directly with details to follow or whether they like all the information at once. You should also identify the medium with which your supervisor prefers to receive information. For example, they may prefer to receive something they can read on their own time, they may be visual and prefer graphs or they may want the information delivered verbally.

## **4. Offer to take on more responsibility for organizing meetings**

- Be proactive about asking your supervisor to let you know in advance what information they would like to cover at meetings so you can print up an agenda in advance. This will make meetings run smoothly and keep conversations on task. It will also make you invaluable to your supervisor, as they will be able to run meetings more effectively.

## **5. Coordinate logistics after meetings**

- If there is any follow-up activity that needs to take place after meetings, volunteer to handle it. This could mean scheduling the next meeting, distributing documents, and following up with anyone who has action items that need to be handled before the next meeting.

# Managing Up Quick Tips

## **6. Volunteer for time-consuming tasks**

- Stand out from other employees by volunteering to take on time-consuming tasks, enabling your supervisor to have more time to focus on other high-priority tasks.

## **7. Alert your supervisor of potential risks and problems**

- Calmly alert your supervisor to any potential risks and problems as soon as you become aware of them. When you're beginning new projects, get in the habit of brainstorming and analyzing potential risks and proactively sharing the risk analysis—as well as strategies for mitigating the risk and backup plans—with your supervisor.

## **8. Create your own to-do list**

- Keep an ongoing task-list for yourself. This will show your supervisor that you're independent and a self-starter. It will assure them that you are fully capable of seeing the work that needs to be done in the office and taking action, which will increase the confidence they have in you.

## **9. Become a consistent source of help**

- Become a go-to source of help for your supervisor as well as others in the office, particularly when you can utilize your unique skill set in doing so. Even if the tasks aren't in your job description, look for ways that you can use your skills for the overall success of the department and organization. Figure out areas in which your supervisor most often struggles and position yourself as the person who they can rely on for help.

## **10. Be solutions-oriented**

- When asking your supervisor for help with a problem, always suggest one or two solutions. This will show your supervisor that you have already put time and effort into figuring out a solution on your own, demonstrating your problem-solving and creative-thinking skills as well as independence. The initiative you took in presenting them with solutions will demonstrate that you weren't relying on them to do the work for you in finding a solution.

# Tips for Managing Up Effectively

## 1. Be aware of your workplace's current priorities

- Being aware of your workplace's current priorities means understanding when to communicate your needs to a supervisor and when to allow others' needs to come before you. For example, you have a few ideas on how to organize the digital filing system better. However, your department is currently preparing for a major product launch. Members of the product team have a lot of work to do, and they frequently need to consult with your supervisor to make important, timely decisions.
- In this situation, you must continue with your own work and make a note of your idea to share during a less-busy time in the office. This ensures that your supervisor has time to consider your idea. It also ensures that you uphold the productivity of your workplace by recognizing higher priorities.

## 2. Be transparent about your goals and professional needs

- As an employee, you need to make sure you communicate your professional goals to your supervisor. This is an important part of managing up because it allows your supervisor to understand your strengths, areas you want to improve and future career goals. Based on what you speak to them about, they can assign you to different tasks and act as a proper mentor figure to you.

## 3. Communicate concisely to promote understanding

- Because supervisors have a lot of work to complete daily, you must communicate through clear and concise messages. For example, instead of writing a three-paragraph email, state your question, idea or need at the top and ask for their thoughts at a convenient time. This ensures that your supervisor understands the point of your message and affects whether they remember to speak with you about it further.

## 4. Complete in-depth research before presenting an idea

- If you want to convince your supervisor about an idea, you have for the department, you must have the evidence to support the idea before you present it to them. By doing your research before, you can answer their immediate questions and give them enough information to make a quick decision about whether to pursue the idea further.

## 5. Balance speaking about work tasks and personal life

- An important part of managing up is maintaining a positive, professional relationship with your supervisor while also connecting with them on a personal level. To do this effectively, you need to balance the time you spend discussing professional topics and personal topics. For instance, after you ask your supervisor a work-related question, ask them how their weekend was or how their family is doing.



# Tips for Managing Up Effectively

## **6. Use questions to help a supervisor realize the potential benefits of an idea**

- If your supervisor is unsure of one of your ideas, ask questions to gauge their reasoning and help them learn more about the idea. One example of this would be if your supervisor was hesitant about your proposal to telecommute twice a week. You could ask questions like, "what are your perceptions about telecommuting?" or, "Is there an alternative option you'd be open to?"

## **7. Speak with your supervisor about your personal obligations and availability outside of standard work hours**

- Depending on your supervisor's preferences, you may need to inform them of certain timeframes after work or on weekends when you won't be available. This is important for establishing your boundaries, but it also helps your supervisor learn more about you, your personal life and how to communicate with you effectively.

## **8. Communicate with your supervisor when you need help**

- When managing up, communicate with your supervisor about challenges or questions you have regarding your job duties. Because your supervisor oversees multiple employees, you need to be proactive to get the information you need to perform your job well.

## **9. Learn to empathize with your supervisor**

- Viewing your supervisor as a person besides being a leader helps you form more meaningful connections with them and encourages you to offer them help when they have a lot of work to complete. You can learn to have empathy for your supervisor by thinking about the potential reasons for their moods or actions and imagining how you'd feel in similar circumstances.

## **10. Evaluate their management style**

- Once you work under a supervisor for a significant time frame, research management styles and determine which style matches their actions. By doing this, you can also discover tips for working with a particular type of supervisor that you can use to enhance your relationship with them in the workplace.

# Tips for Managing Up Effectively

## **11. Assume they don't know your work tasks as well as you do when developing questions or ideas**

- Supervisors usually have a variety of different job titles to oversee daily, and they may or may not have previous experience working in those roles. Therefore, you need to assume they might not have the same level of understanding about your job title when you manage up. Using this idea as part of your managing up strategy, you can clarify your verbal or written messages to them. You can also use examples of your daily job duties to help them understand what you need to do your job well.

## **12. Ask your supervisor to define your job and their expectations**

- When interacting with a new supervisor, you can manage up by speaking with them about how they define your job within the larger context of the company and by asking them directly about what expectations they have for you as an employee. By understanding your supervisor's expectations, you can use them as a guide to communicate with them and make meaningful contributions to your job role.

## **13. Be honest when they ask for your feedback**

- Another important part of managing up is being honest when a supervisor asks for your feedback about their performance, workplace culture or current procedures. It allows them to determine areas for improvement and it gives you the chance to share your thoughts on how you can help them improve one or more areas in the workplace.

## **14. Take advantage of one-on-ones**

- One-on-one meetings allow you to speak with your supervisor for an extended time frame. These usually occur as performance reviews, but they also allow employees to ask questions about their job duties, future promotional opportunities and recent changes to the workplace. It also gives employees the chance to discuss any ideas they want to discuss with their supervisor.

# Work Ethic Skills

- **Accountability:** Having accountability means you manage your own work well without much oversight. If you are accountable, you will be seen as a reliable team member who is responsible and contributes well to a task or project.
- **Discipline:** Having discipline means you are focused and complete tasks no matter the circumstances. Managing your time well is a key component of practicing discipline.
- **Honesty:** Being truthful at work is valuable because it can help tasks to be completed more quickly and in a quality way. Practice honesty when giving feedback, sharing project ideas, and when you have made a mistake. Owning and improving upon mistakes at work shows that you are willing to take risks and learn from them.
- **Humility:** Being humble means having a healthy perspective of your own importance in the workplace. This does not mean that you should have a negative or low view of your work or skills. Instead, it means that you prioritize listening to others, share your own ideas when it will be valuable, and are honest about both your wins and your areas of improvement.
- **Integrity:** Integrity is always doing the right thing no matter who is watching. Practicing integrity results in gaining the trust of those around you.
- **Organization:** Being well organized can help you get tasks done on time, communicate clearly with others, and set proper expectations about your work. You might keep several workspaces organized such as your desk, computer, calendar, and notes.
- **Quality work:** While it is crucial to turn your work in on time, it is also important that the work is done well and meets all requirements. If you consistently complete work that needs revisions and leads to more time and effort, you may not be considered as having a strong work ethic.
- **Responsibility:** Being responsible at work is a general quality that results in your work being done well, on time, and practicing good communication skills with those around you. Responsible people know what is expected of them and deliver on those expectations.
- **Teamwork:** Working well with others is a key component of work ethic. This involves having respect for those around you, practicing proper communication skills, and having empathy so you understand how to interact best with each individual you work with. This will allow you to easily work alongside a team towards a common goal.
- **Time management:** Managing your time well can help you meet deadlines, set appointments or meetings and communicate proper expectations about your schedule. It is also important to be punctual at work both when you arrive and when you have meetings.

# Communication Types

## 1. Verbal

Verbal communication is the use of language to transfer information through speaking or sign language. It is one of the most common types, often used during presentations, video conferences and phone calls, meetings and one-on-one conversations. Verbal communication is important because it is efficient. It can be helpful to support verbal communication with both nonverbal and written communication.

Here are a few steps you can take to develop your verbal communication skills:

- **Use a strong, confident speaking voice.** Especially when presenting information to a few or a group of people, be sure to use a strong voice so that everyone can easily hear you. Be confident when speaking so that your ideas are clear and easy for others to understand.
- **Use active listening.** The other side of using verbal communication is intently listening to and hearing others. Active listening skills are key when conducting a meeting or presentation or even when participating in a one-on-one conversation. Doing so will help you grow as a communicator.
- **Avoid filler words.** It can be tempting, especially during a presentation, to use filler words such as “um,” “like,” “so” or “yeah.” While it might feel natural after completing a sentence or pausing to collect your thoughts, it can also be distracting for your audience. Try presenting to a trusted friend or colleague who can call attention to the times you use filler words. Try to replace them by taking a breath when you are tempted to use them.

# Communication Types

## 2. Nonverbal

Nonverbal communication is the use of body language, gestures, and facial expressions to convey information to others. For example, you might smile unintentionally when you hear a pleasing or enjoyable idea or piece of information. Nonverbal communication is helpful when trying to understand others' thoughts and feelings. If they are displaying "closed" body language, such as crossed arms or hunched shoulders, they might be feeling anxious, angry, or nervous.

Here are a few steps you can take to develop your nonverbal communication skills:

- **Notice how your emotions feel physically.** Throughout the day, as you experience a range of emotions (anything from energized, bored, happy, or frustrated), try to identify where you feel that emotion within your body. For example, if you're feeling anxious, you might notice that your stomach feels tight. Developing self-awareness around how your emotions affect your body can give you greater mastery over your external presentation.
- **Be intentional about your nonverbal communications.** Make an effort to display positive body language when you feel alert, open, and positive about your surroundings. You can also use body language to support your verbal communication if you feel confused or anxious about information, like using a furrowed brow. Use body language alongside verbal communication such as asking follow-up questions or pulling the presenter aside to give feedback.
- **Mimic nonverbal communications you find effective.** If you find certain facial expressions or body language beneficial to a certain setting, use it as a guide when improving your own nonverbal communications. For example, if you see that when someone nods their head it communicates approval and positive feedback efficiently, use it in your next meeting when you have the same feelings.

# Communication Types

## 3. Visual

Visual communication is the act of using photographs, art, drawings, sketches, charts, and graphs to convey information. Visuals are often used as an aid during presentations to provide helpful context alongside written and/or verbal communication.

Here are a few steps you can take to develop your visual communication skills:

- **Ask others before including visuals.** If you are considering sharing a visual aid in your presentation or email, consider asking others for feedback. Adding visuals can sometimes make concepts confusing or muddled.
- **Consider your audience.** Be sure to include visuals that are easily understood by your audience. For example, if you are displaying a chart with unfamiliar data, be sure to take time and explain what is happening in the visual and how it relates to what you are saying.
- To make improvements to your communication skills, set personal goals to work through the things you want to accomplish step by step. It might be helpful to consult with trusted colleagues, supervisors or mentors to identify which areas would be best to focus on first.



# Communication Types

## 4. Written

Writing is commonly used to share information through books, pamphlets, blogs, letters, memos, and more. Emails and chats are common forms of written communication in the workplace. (Texting?)

Here are a few steps you can take to develop your written communication skills:

- **Strive for simplicity.** Written communications should be as simple and clear as possible. While it might be helpful to include lots of detail in instructional communications, for example, you should look for areas where you can write as clearly as possible for your audience to understand.
- **Don't rely on tone.** Because you do not have the nuance of verbal and nonverbal communication, be careful when you are trying to communicate a certain tone when writing. Keep your writing as simple and plain as possible and follow up with verbal communications where you can add more personality.
- **Take time to review your written communications.** Setting time aside to re-read your emails, letters or memos can help you identify mistakes or opportunities to say something different. For important communications or those that will be sent to a large number of people, have a trusted colleague review it as well. In law, strong writing skills are essential.
- **Keep a file of writing you find effective or enjoyable.** If you receive a certain pamphlet, email, or memo that you find particularly helpful or interesting, save it for reference when writing your own communications. Incorporating methods or styles you like can help you to improve over time.



# Questions to Learn More About Opportunities for Growth and Career Progression

Career growth and personal development are important items to address. Here are some questions you can ask that focus on career advancement:

- *What future roles would be suitable for my skills and career growth?*
- *What new skills should I acquire to perform my duties better?*
- *How can I improve my skills and competency?*
- *What additional responsibilities can I take so I can gain more experience and develop my career?*
- *Would you be willing to sponsor my training program?*
- *Is there something that you feel is holding me back in my work? If yes, what is it and why?*
- *In your opinion, what are my greatest strengths? Which of them should I focus on more?*
- *Is there someone you would want me to develop a better network with? Could we work together on a project?*

# Questions to Understand the Requirements and Resources of Your Job

Find out what resources your supervisor thinks are sufficient for your job. Understanding their perspective will help you align your duties better with the resources available to you. You can also request additional resources if it will help you achieve your goals.

Here are some questions you can ask about your role:

- *What is the biggest challenge our team is facing right now?*
- *What can I do to support you better?*
- *What would you change if you were in my place and why?*
- *Is there anything you would like to know about my job?*
- *Can you make more resources available to help me finish my current project?*

**A supervisor's responsibilities often include:**

**7**  
**Helping to resolve employee issues and disputes**

**1**  
**Managing workflow**

**6**  
**Identifying and applying career advancement opportunities**

## **Responsibilities of a Supervisor**

Supervisors are responsible for managing a team's progress and maintaining a positive environment.

**2**  
**Training new hires**

**5**  
**Evaluating performance and providing feedback**

**3**  
**Creating and managing team schedules**

**4**  
**Reporting to HR and senior management**

# Tips for Being an Effective Supervisor

An employee is someone who you rely on to complete the tasks you need to further your business. The abilities and skills of your employees can directly affect your success as a supervisor. As an effective supervisor, you should make it a priority to foster positive relationships with the people who report to you.

Ways that you can encourage constructive relationships between yourself and your employees include:

- **Encourage open communication**
  - Communication is a major component not only for successful employee relationships but also for a company or law firm as a whole. Encouraging open communication can let your employees know that you are willing to listen to their concerns and take their opinions seriously. One way to encourage communication is to practice an open-door policy and face-to-face interactions. When employees come to you with their concerns, ideas, or complaints, be sure that you are attentive and considerate.
- **Be clear about job expectations**
  - It can be challenging for an employee to meet your expectations if they don't fully understand their role within the company. Clearly defining the responsibilities for each position within your team can help your employees more effectively meet their goals and increase productivity.
- **Offer constructive feedback**
  - As a supervisor, it's your job to understand your employees' strengths and weaknesses and work to develop their skills in their position. One way you can do this is through constructive feedback, focusing on specific issues, and remaining positive and encouraging. When offering feedback, make sure to cite the challenge and give ways the employee can overcome the obstacle in the future.



# How to Improve Communication with Difficult Teams

Difficult teams may find that changing the way they approach communication can improve the group dynamic.

For example, if your team operates remotely, you may suggest employing technology that humanizes interaction. Tone can be difficult to understand over email, instant messages, and text, so consider organizing conference calls or video chat meetings. If your team meets in person, you may find that employing active listening and open body language can offer greater ease in communication. Additional strategies that can help improve communication, regardless of the means of meeting, include:

## **1. Invite discussion and feedback**

- When open to feedback, teams can work together to make improvements. Consider holding regular meetings, either in-person or virtually, to check with team members. In these meetings, encourage people to provide constructive feedback and possible solutions. When provided frequently, feedback feels less personal and can be easier to integrate.

## **2. Simplify the message**

- If you find communicating with your team to be a challenge, it may help to simplify your message. Remove anything that is not necessary to the main points. Make sure that you clarify your end goal, your reasoning, and your plan.

## **3. Use visuals to help explain complex messages**

- People process information in various ways. Even if you have simplified your message, your team may best understand information visually. Some situations that can benefit from visuals include new procedure illustrations, graphs to show productivity goals, inspiration boards or detailed business model charts.

## **4. Plan your timing**

- Plan to deliver important messages during optimal times. For example, you might provide new information for a project at the beginning of a workday. You may want to deliver feedback during a time when the person or team you are addressing can focus, like after lunch.

# How to Improve Communication with Difficult Teams

## **5. Increase face-to-face communication time**

- Some workplaces rely mostly on messaging and email for in-office communication. While this virtual method is beneficial when sending a quick message, you can improve communication by handling longer conversations face-to-face. When people have a chance to interact in person, they can establish relationships and understand each other more clearly.

## **6. Be intentional with your body language**

- This powerful nonverbal communication tool contributes to the overall message you deliver. Making eye contact and maintaining good posture, if possible, can show that you are listening attentively. If you are presenting information, you can display confidence by standing up straight, keeping a slightly wide stance, and using a moderate amount of expressive gestures. If you are collaborating in a group setting, smiling, using friendly gestures and mirroring can help you communicate your intentions and engagement in your group.

## **7. Use calming techniques**

- In high-energy groups or where people have strong emotional ties to a project, consider using calming techniques to maintain open communication. You might suggest that your team steps away from the conversation, focuses on a resolution, and sticks to the relevant issue. You can keep the objectives and end goal in mind and recognize that disagreements can lead to new ways of thinking.

## **8. Look for ways to relate**

- Take the time to relate to other coworkers through shared experiences. Seeking things you have in common with the people you work with can help establish your relationship with them. Friendly social communication can improve job satisfaction and performance, as well.
- Consider addressing effective communication skills within your teams to establish best practices for open communication. You can maintain a friendly and collaborative atmosphere to share ideas and improve your team's opportunity for success.



## **Julie Beavers, Director, Client Services, Lawyers Mutual**

Julie Beavers joined Lawyers Mutual as Director of Client Services in October 2018 where she provides risk management resources and education to policyholders and the legal profession. She is active in the North Carolina legal community and is a frequent CLE and professional development speaker with regional bar groups and national organizations. Locally, Julie is a member of the Board of Legal Specialization at the NC State Bar and serves as an Advisory Member of the CLE Committee. At the North Carolina Bar Association, she is a member of the Small Firm & Technology Council and previously served as Chair of the Transitioning Lawyers Commission and the Professional Wellness Committee. Julie is also active with the Raleigh Chapter of the Legal Marketing Association. She is a founding member and a three-term president of the Triangle Association of Legal Recruitment Administrators (TALRA), a city group of law firm recruitment professionals and law school career development professionals. On a national level, Julie is active with the NABRICO Marketing & Communications group and a member of NAMIC, the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies. She previously held several national and regional leadership positions with the National Association of Legal Career Professionals (NALP), the organization that governs recruiting practices for private and public sector employers and accredited law schools in the US and Canada.

A native of eastern North Carolina, Julie earned a Bachelor of Science from East Carolina University and a Human Resource Management Certification from Duke University. Before joining Lawyers Mutual, she served in professional roles at Ward and Smith, P.A., Campbell University School of Law, and Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice, PLLC.