

# Navigating the Member-Supervisor Relationship

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# Our Presenter: Cathy Lins

Cathy has been working with AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA members and sponsors since 1998 to help members begin their service and identify specific steps they can take to succeed in what they are doing for their community and organization.

She works with nonprofits across the US and on multiple continents. Her current focus is on expanding her “Financially Savvy Nonprofits” online training program and her frequent posts regarding fundraising and organizational management on her LinkedIn page.





# Session Objectives

By the end of this session, members will be able to:

- Implement management methods to strengthen respect, communication, and trust with their supervisors
- Apply strategies to improve giving and receiving feedback and handling difficult conversations
- Identify action steps to better understand and work with their supervisors and manage workplace challenges

# Managing Up

“Managing up is the process of consciously working with your boss to obtain the best possible results for you, your boss, and your organization. It is not political maneuvering or kissing up. Rather, it is a deliberate effort to bring understanding and cooperation to a relationship between individuals who often have different perspectives.”

– Thomas J. Zuber, MD and Erika H. James, PhD



# Benefits of Managing Up/Out/Down

- A. Establish mutual understanding
- B. Receive helpful guidance and feedback
- C. Minimize misinterpretation and miscommunication
- D. Benefit from respective strengths, skills, and expertise
- E. Focus on project priorities
- F. Create a respectful and supportive working relationship

# Chat Box Question

Which of these benefits would you most like to work on at your site/project?

List the letter in the chat box as I take us back to the last slide.



# Strategies to Build Understanding

- Build a shared vision
- Understand and appreciate difference
- Establish a regular scheduled meeting time



# Build a Shared Vision

## Sample Managing Up Questions

- What qualities do you like to see in a member of your team?
- What is your preferred mode of communication?
- From your perspective, what are the most important activities for my project?
- What are your expectations of this project?
- What can I handle on my own and what needs your approval?
- How often would you like status updates on this project?
- What are your top priorities for this project?
- What would you like to tell me about you that may help me succeed in this member assignment, and help us succeed in working together?



# Managing Members

- Micro-managing is necessary when the member doesn't have the skills; and when they need your step-by-step instruction to achieve the goal.
- Micro-managing will cause attrition if you violate the agreement of Delegation Level.

# Fives Levels of Delegation

**Level 1: Do as I say.**

**Level 2: Research and report.**

**Level 3: Research and recommend.**

**Level 4: Decide and inform.**

**Level 5: Act independently.**



# Chat Box Question

Did you ever communicate your Delegation Level to your supervisors or members?

Yes.

No.

Maybe.

How many of you are thinking about going back and revisiting this point with your teams?

Me

Not Me

# Take a Stand - Chat Box Post Your Answer



1

2

3

4

5

As I read a scenario to you, choose your spot on the continuum (1-5). Choose only one number.

Write your answer in the chat box. Then tell us why you picked that spot.



# Understand and Appreciate Difference

## Workplace Values and Norms

- Power and authority  
(autocratic vs democratic)
- Purpose of work (live to work vs work to live)
- Risk and uncertainty tolerance  
(embraced vs avoided)
- Personal and professional lives  
(separated vs integrated)
- Motivation  
(achievement/advancement vs comfort/security)
- Productivity  
(results vs harmony)
- Valued skills  
(technical vs people)
- View of time  
(rigid vs flexible)

# Establish a Regular Scheduled Meeting Time

## 1:1 Meeting Best Practices

- 30 minutes, once a week
- Regularly scheduled
- Rarely missed



## Establish a Regular Scheduled Meeting Time

10 min

For AmeriCorps member

10 min

For Supervisor

10 min

For career/growth/development

# Types of Feedback



Objective  
Observation



Appreciative  
Feedback



Developmental  
Feedback



# Objective Observation

- Focus on the person's behavior.
- Get specific and note exactly what the person said or did.
- Ask yourself, "Would other people see or hear what I saw or heard?"
- Pretend you are taking a video of that person and then playing it back...what would you see or hear?
- Say what you observed without judgment.
- Avoid personal opinion or assumptions.



# Appreciative Feedback



**Step 1:**  
Start with the observation.

"I noticed you said hi to each youth as they arrived at your after school program."

**Step 2:**  
Reflect back on your observation, based on facts.

"I saw smiles on young people's faces and excitement to get started on their projects."

**Step 3:**  
Communicate what that behavior means to you or the impact that it has made to the team, project, or organization.

"I greatly appreciate how your greeting of each youth creates a welcoming climate for all youth and creates an environment where they can build community and do good work on their projects."



# Developmental Feedback



<b>Observation</b>	"John, I noticed that I have been spending a lot of time developing a volunteer database and less time recruiting and training volunteers."
<b>Impact of Behavior</b>	"I am concerned that if I don't spend enough time finding and training volunteers, I will not be able to meet our goal to tutor more youth."
<b>Request for the Future</b>	"Could we make a plan together for me to better balance my time so that I can carry out all the responsibilities for volunteer engagement?"

# How Do You Like to Receive Feedback?

- Timing?
- In-person vs. in writing?
- One-on-one vs. group setting?
- Direct vs. indirect?





# Difficult Conversations

- Three components:
  - Strong disagreement
  - Emotions run high
  - Issue/cause is important to all
- Often trigger a freeze, fight, or flee response



# Starting a Difficult Conversation

- Use I-statements
- Speak to be heard, not to change minds
- Express your needs and ask for theirs
- Make reasonable requests
- Refrain from judgment





# I-Statements

1. I feel...
2. When \_\_ happens... (describe the behavior, not the person)
3. It makes me think...
4. And I would like to... (to discuss this with you, etc.)



# Common Supervisor Challenges

- My supervisor is intimidating
- My supervisor is super busy and doesn't have time for me
- My supervisor uses the "no news is good news" approach
- I have multiple supervisors
- My supervisor shares too much personal info





# Chat Box Question

How could you approach this conversation using I-statements?

# Next Step Ideas

- Spend time reflecting on you and your member's communication and work styles
- Draft a few relationship-building questions to try out on your member
- Schedule a 1:1 meeting and try out the 1:1 and 10-10-10 meeting tools
- Think of three people who have helped you recently at your site and draft and thank them using (specific, detailed) feedback
- Practice I-messages with a friend



What questions  
do you have?

