

How can I get more independence in doing my job?

by Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

When you first begin your career, your boss keeps a pretty tight rein on you. She doesn't know you or how you think. Your ability to behave independently is directly related to his trust in you. There's a four-step process in doing your job that moves you toward independence.

1. *Wait to be told what to do.* That's how you start out because you've been told what to do by parents and teachers. At that time, it's not a bad thing to have a manager who's a micromanager/drill sergeant who gives you clear boundaries and limited freedom, with very little rope to hang yourself with. You'll learn fast how to do things right and how things work, and the better you do that, the more quickly your boss will lighten up (we hope). It's not how you want to continue your career, so you might want to ditch the boss who keeps you on too short a leash.

2. *Ask the boss if you can take action.* If the trust level is developing, the answer will be yes. You want to develop this attitude throughout your career because it means you're trying to think broadly about issues and coming up with solutions, and organizations value that. You may not be right at first, but take the boss' adjustments with as good a humor as you can and keep pushing. At this stage you'll begin to learn the value of asking questions instead of standing around acting as if you know. Asking questions makes you look smart, and you might avoid political skinned knees if you ask before leaping.

3. *Take action and then report back.* In truth, we don't get beyond this stage, because it's always a good idea to keep your boss informed. Bosses don't like surprises. So, whether you send an "FYI" email or a monthly report, it's a good thing to keep your fearless leader in the information loop. As you gain more experience, the level of detail required will dramatically drop, and you'll be flapping your independence wings.

4. *Act independently.* This is the highest step of freedom. You stride about your day making decisions, setting and achieving goals and being answerable to few. I'm not sure you ever really get to that level, whether you have a boss or you are your own as the owner of a company and working with customers. In order for things to work, you just have to let people know what's going on. It's just good business, and it helps you develop relationships when you include other people.

And, frankly, if you can (a) express problems and propose solutions and (b) develop good relationships up and down the organizational chart, your long-term success is practically guaranteed.