

## **Manage Up**

**By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.**

As bosses go, he was the sleaze of unethical sleazes. You name it, he was it: a political dog, predator of women, liar. You leave a meeting with him and wish you could go bathe. But he taught me a valuable lesson: the importance of managing up.

I hadn't been doing that, of course. I had this Champion of the People thing going; I thought it my duty to defend them, challenge him, help him see the righter path; oh, and do a great job.

No, no, my little chickadee, he counseled. "It's all very well and good for you to turn in a fine performance and achieve those goals," (waving a hand at the outline of and reason for our discussion), "The most important thing to get right is to make your boss happy." This wasn't a sexual innuendo. He was telling me that my focus had to be making sure I was doing the job that mattered to HIM, and only secondarily to ME. What were HIS needs? What would make HIM look good, take care of HIS emergencies, give him chits with HIS boss? And, by the way, I wasn't getting high marks from him on that score.

I left his office to search for a washcloth, indignant at this slimy advice; but over time as I've waved the boss's wand myself, I had to admit I agreed with him. As I've mentally lined up my best-ever employees, I didn't pick the ones struggling into Joan of Arc armor, but those who had "How can I help you today, oh great one?" sensibilities. It wasn't a mewling sycophancy, but a feeling my goals were shared and it was worth it to change evening plans to get my job done or run interference to keep me from stumbling into a rat hole.

You have to be careful in adopting this necessary attitude. Your taking care of the boss is the pendulum's first swing. The next is how the boss takes care of you in return. If he gives you your lead and lets you prance then your managing-up super-efforts are worth it. But if your lathering mouth and worn out hooves solicit his indifference or lack of a reward, then this particular racetrack isn't paying the right stakes. You need to go someplace where they'll run you hard, but treat you like a champion in return.

Managing up means to give up some of your idealism, but your whole career is an exercise in exchanging youthful black-and-white, high contrast ideals for the variegated frays of reality. If you can't stand to do it, then you have to find the occupation that doesn't require managing up. You can, but you'll stay lower in the organizational food chain or you'll head to the sole practitioner's stall.

Carry the boss's banner. It'll take you further.