TRANSCRIPT DOWNLOAD

BUILDING A LEADERSHIP BRAND

Welcome to The Highly Valued Leader podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Hey there, leaders. Welcome back to the podcast. Today we're talking about managing up. This really comes up all the time. I don't care if you're a new leader or a seasoned leader, there are constantly different challenges with managing up inside any organization. It really depends on the number of stakeholders you have, who they are, how they act, who you are, and how comfortable you are managing up, there are so many aspects to it; when to do it, when not to do it, yada, yada, yada.

I have a lot of clients who struggle with the right ways to manage up and build relationships with their stakeholders that actually help them do the thing that I always talk about, which is, as leaders, we create the environment for results to happen. As a leader, you know that getting the work done is actually only half the job. Sometimes less than half the job depends on how seasoned the leader you are so getting the work done, particularly when you were a doer was like the whole job. Immediately, when you start leading a team, it becomes half the job and then gets less and less from there because the bigger part is managing the people. That's the other half.

And as you get more seasoned, there are certainly more segments to it–managing the business strategy, managing the industry. There are lots of things that come up. But at the beginning, it's definitely about half the job is getting the work done. The other half is just managing all the people and how things are spinning around you up, down, and across the organization.

As I said, the more senior you get, the people part of the job takes a bigger and bigger percentage of your time. So managing up really is not only a big part of the job, but a big part of your success. It's something that if you haven't been doing it or you've been doing it sporadically, you're going to want to think about how to add this as a more consistent part of what you do.

Today, what I want to cover is talking about what managing up is. I think you probably all really understand that already but let's just have some level-setting sense of clarity around that. And then I want to give you three categories for managing up. I'm not going to tell you exactly how to do it because it's so nuanced. I'm going to give you some examples and some ideas. But really, when you think about the idea of managing up, what are three categories of managing up that you want to add to what you do? Your repertoire of what you do in your job

© SAVAGE LIFE

so that you can really structure your approach to it. I'm going to deep dive into each category. And like I said, I'm going to give you examples and all that stuff.

I think what I hear most from my clients about the idea of managing up, but there are so many different reasons why people aren't doing it, and I think the very first one is that they're not really sure what it is. They're not sure how to do it. They're uncertain that they might do it wrong, especially when you're brand new like you don't want to make any mistakes or you're still trying to prove yourself all the time. Please stop doing that. But that's for another day.

You're just so unsure that you don't want to make a mistake and there's this sort of authority thing at play, where you don't think maybe you're seasoned enough to be able to be managing up so that you just don't do it. There are too many barriers, there's too much discomfort around it for you so you just quit ahead of time on trying to learn how to do it and you just focus on getting your hands dirty and getting the work done. And eventually, you will transition out of that. You will need to.

But at the beginning, people just think, *"I don't know what this is… I don't know what managing up is… I'm just not going to do it… I have other more important things to do…"* This is your avoidance tactic that a lot of people have. *"I don't have time to figure out how to do that, or I'm too busy doing these other very important things."* And we use that as an excuse to avoid doing the things that we're uncomfortable doing.

The first one is people are just not sure how to do it, they don't want to fail and don't do it. Then there are people who do it when things are on fire. They just manage up when there's a problem. And I get that. Definitely manage up when there's a problem. But when you manage up consistently, you can avoid a lot of fires. You don't want to also be seen as the person who only drops problems on your stakeholders or your boss or whatever. Consistent managing up is going to create a much more well-rounded brand for you and might help you avoid fires that don't need to be there.

Another one that I hear all the time why people avoid doing this is that it's just too hard to do because your stakeholders are all over the place. I'm going to address that because quite often, you will have multiple stakeholders and each of those stakeholders is going to have their own personalities so they're not going to align effectively.

Even with one stakeholder, just say your boss, for instance, they themselves could be all over the place and inconsistent so they make it difficult. And when things become difficult, we just avoid doing them. We try to work around things, which by the way, just causes problems, too. I'm not saying it's never a solution, but I wouldn't use it as the first solution in many cases.

I think people also think, *"I shouldn't have to do this… They're more senior than me, they should know more than me... They should leave me, I already have too many people to lead… They should be leading themselves, they're grownups."* I get the inclination, but I'm going to talk about why it's so important that you look at your stakeholders as part of the people that you lead.

When you're thinking, *"I'm not sure what it is… I'm only going to do when things are on fire… I'm going to try to work around these people because they're too chaotic… They're grownups, they should lead themselves..,"* when you're thinking like that, basically, what ends up happening is you take a really ad hoc strategy to managing up or you just don't have a strategy at all, or you don't prioritize it. What ends up happening is that you just don't do it effectively and you get caught out a lot of the time.

© SAVAGE LIFE

But when you do manage up effectively, when you do decide, *"This is something that I think is really important, and I've got to figure this out, and I'm going to be brave, and I'm going to try this..,"* when you do manage up effectively, then you actually do create the environment for results to happen, which is actually your job. When you're not managing up, you're not doing your job.

This helps you create the environment for results to happen, and you learn to do things. I'm going to say you become more flexible. You become more resilient when you manage up effectively because, like I said before, sometimes your stakeholders are all over the place. Sometimes your boss is all over the place.

And even though you would love it if people would just do things when they're supposed to do them and deliver what they say they're going to deliver and everyone can be organized and get things done, these people aren't going to create hurdles for you. They're not going to do things in the way that you would like to do them. And so what that creates for you is the skill set of being able to do things that are maybe less than ideal for you, but teach you to be able to expand your way of thinking about things, learning to believe that things can be done in lots of different ways, not just your way.

It creates the need for you to slow down, really think things through, learn to let things go, and trust your partners, and it actually enforces you to access the creativity part of your brain to find new solutions and new ways of doing things when you're not avoiding managing up completely because it's not an easy skill set. Anything that involves people gets complicated really fast, but that doesn't mean that it's not solvable. You're a problem solver.

I'm not saying people are a problem, but sometimes they present hurdles and things that we have to work through that are not as easy peasy as we would like them so we need to access the creativity part of our brain, which is brilliant, because you need to be able to grow that part of your brain. You need to be able to build that muscle as a leader creativity because I will always say that's the number one skill set of a great leader, right to the C suite is your ability to be creative and think creatively. Learning to manage up effectively is going to force you to build that muscle in your brain.

Next, we're talking about pre-selling things, meaning when you manage up effectively, you can start to plant seeds with people about what you're going to be doing or selling them or wanting to get them on board with later. That's going to be a key part of managing up. And it's not always just planting seeds, sometimes it's gathering information so that it can inform your sales strategy.

What I mean by that is if you're trying to work cross-functionally with some departments and bring forward a solution, rather than just showing up cold and presenting to a wide group of people who have never heard this before, you can certainly present ideas or objectives for what you're trying to create with your stakeholders ahead of time and get their feedback into what they think it's important. And if it was important to them, what would be important for them to see in a solution and yada, yada, yada.

You're just talking to them and creating a more broad solution set for whatever it is you're trying to create. So that when you actually then create the solution, you can go back and be like, *"I was thinking something like this, what do you think?"* And when you've talked to them one-on-one, you can pre-sell things. So by the time you get to the room when you're actually presenting the solution, people are already on board. That's a really great way to use managing up effectively.

Another reason to manage up and I haven't gone to the three categories yet, by the way, but I want to give you some benefits of managing up. I talked about it that it's your job. I talked about how it challenges your creative

© SAVAGE LIFE

thinking. I talked about how it's going to help you sell what you're trying to do ahead of time, like pre-sell things. It also helps you get what you need for your career when you're building these relationships. Again, you can start to plant seeds. You can start to have people see you as this orchestrator that I'm going to talk about and it's going to help you get what you need for your career.

The last one is just really obvious, but we don't think about it at all a lot is it helps you build strong relationships with your stakeholders so that when you're not just managing up, but when you need them to help you clear the path so that you can create the environment for your team to do their work, you can call on that relationship. That trusted relationship that you've built with your stakeholders, you can leverage that.

At McDonald's, we used to call it the Trust Bank when you've built trust with people. And I'm sure it's not just McDonald's because I've heard it in other places, too. But you're constantly putting deposits in the Trust Bank. I know it sounds so juvenile, but it's a nice little visualization. There are lots of reasons to do it. I get why you might not be doing it. But when you do it, because it's part of your job, there are lots of side benefits. There are lots of great benefits to actually taking the time to figure this out.

Because effectively at its core, managing up is about nurturing. Nurturing, I love this word because it really speaks to the consistency of the effort. It's about nurturing a productive working relationship with your boss and with your other key stakeholders so that you can achieve your goals. Not just your team, not just the organization so that you can achieve your goals.

As a leader, you're not just working here so that you can grow the organization's bottom line. At the end of the day, every day you go to work, it needs to be about you. It needs to be about you and your success. In order to be successful, sometimes it's important that we don't focus on ourselves, meaning we have to focus on the needs of other people, but it's always in service of what we need to do for our own growth in our own careers. I could go down this rabbit hole all day long because I'm the biggest proponent of being in service of others, and also being in service of ourselves.

At the end of the day, we're showing up to do a job and getting paid, but we're doing all of this so that we can be successful, and we can support our families. I know I'm going off on a tangent. Let's go back to managing up. Because really, I could go down this rabbit hole. Let's just talk about you as the leader for a second. I think a lot of the time people think of themselves as leaders of their team. And in their mind, their team are the people that report to them, or even a little bit maybe their peer group.

But I want you to think of yourself as the sun, if you will, like you're the center of the galaxy, in this case, and all the planets revolve around you. I don't care if those planets represent your team, your peers, your stakeholders, your boss, your clients, or your vendor partners. Your job is to be a leader for all of them based on what you do, what your remit is, and what you're responsible for. Your job is to be a leader to all of them, so you are the sun for your job.

I also sometimes will explain it like being an orchestra leader. And I don't think I'm the only one who explains it this way because I've heard it kind of fed back to me from other people. You're the leader of the orchestra, you're the conductor of the orchestra and everyone that you work with is an instrument in your orchestra. Your team, for instance, might be the percussion section of your orchestra because they are keeping the beat. They are keeping things moving. They are the constant underlying drumbeat of everything that's going on. Whereas maybe your boss and some of the senior stakeholders are wind instruments, not to be offensive or anything. And your peers

© SAVAGE LIFE

are a section and your clients are and your vendors are and your customers are and all the things. Everyone is a section in the orchestra. I want you to think about yourself like that.

Each of those sections of the orchestra will require a different kind of leadership from you, based on their role in the song. But your job is to keep it all together. When it comes to managing up, I would say that there are three categories, like I said, of managing up that you really want to integrate into what you do all the time. And in each category that I'm going to talk about, you need to identify your audience. Your boss might be in all of these categories, but who else is in these categories?

Depending on the size of your organization, you might say there are 20 or 30 people in each category, then you have to pick. You have to be really strategic and you have to pick the main ones, the most important ones, because you can't zoom in on all the people all the time. You have to pick the most important ones. And sometimes it's in the context of what it is you're trying to manage up. But usually, there is a consistency of main stakeholders that you really need to make sure you're focusing on.

The three buckets of managing up that I'm going to talk about and I'm going to give you them to you right now. One is ***managing the relationship***. The second bucket is ***managing the work***. And the third bucket for managing up is ***managing your career***. Managing the relationship, managing the work, and managing your career. Those are the three different categories of managing up that you need to do with your specific audiences.

I'm going to start with managing the relationship. Because relationship, as I've said before, I think even earlier in this podcast, if I'm not mistaken, as you get more senior, it is more and more so important in your success. You can't effectively manage the work until you figure out how to effectively manage the relationship. If you have a bad relationship with somebody, it's going to make the work that you're doing that much harder to execute, particularly if that person is your boss because they're a sort of the primary advocate for you. Sometimes we have other advocates if our bosses don't like us, which works to an extent, but it's really hard. It just makes it harder when your boss is not on your side so how can you effectively manage up to have a great relationship with your boss?

Managing the relationship really means that you take a leadership role in creating a strong and trusted relationship with that person because primarily, the power is with them. It's different than when you have your reports. You kind of have the power. When I say the power, I mean, the authority to make the decisions. Everyone has their own power, don't get me wrong. But the decision-making authority is with them; with your team, it's you. So you might be able to manage the relationship slightly differently with your team, like your people who report to you than the people who you report to, or who are more senior than you.

That doesn't mean though that you can't take a leadership role in creating the relationship. But because the power is with them, sometimes we think that they're responsible, or they have a bigger hand in the quality of the relationship. But that's not true. You are still in charge of the quality of the relationship. You can be still in charge of the quality of the relationship, and I highly recommend that you take that leadership.

I did a podcast episode a few episodes ago before this one called, *Building Trusted Relationships,* and I highly suggest that you listen to that episode. Sometimes we think trusted relationships are about trusting people to do what they say they're going to do and be who they say they're going to be and having our backs and all that stuff, but that's not really the essence of a trusted relationship at work. It's really, I think, in a nutshell about trusting people to be who they act like, and learning to manage them for that and meeting them there. Trusting them to be who they are, not who they say they're going to be, or who we wish they would be. Just like taking the reality

© SAVAGE LIFE

that's in front of us and trusting that. Go back and listen to that episode because there are lots of gems in there, too.

There's going to be all different kinds of stakeholders and relationships that you need to manage. The best case is that these stakeholders, care about building a relationship with you as much as you care about building a relationship with them. They see the value in it, they see the value in you, and that would make it really easy. That's one end of the spectrum.

The other end of the spectrum is they don't like you, or they think that they're the center of the universe, and we all revolve around them, and they get to act however they want and maybe they act badly or unprofessionally, whatever you want to call it. I think those are the two different ends of the spectrum. By the way, there are lots of variations in between. Either way, you can use the exact same strategy, which is about leading that relationship experience.

Here are some effective ways to manage the relationship with your boss or other senior management, depending on who you're targeting. It could be clients or whatever. And I think the main thing is noticing their value or their potential. First is just noticing their value or potential. Every single person that's there, be it your boss or someone else has value of some kind. You have to set your mind to figure out what is that person's value.

So much of the time, we focus on what's wrong with them. *"They're not doing it right… They're making my life hard... They do this, they do that… They're not enough of this and not enough of that…"* And we're so focused on how we feel about it and how they're challenging us or triggering us that we don't stop and think, *"Okay, what's the deal here? What's the value of this person."* It may not be what you want it to be. And you can feel bad about that, if you want to and make your life more difficult, or you can focus on what's actually there and keep asking yourself, *"Okay, what is the value of this person? What do they add to this? What are they trying to add to this?",* which is kind of the second thing is looking for their potential, but also understanding what makes them tick.

Everybody, especially when they're behaving unprofessionally has a motivation. So what is it that they care about? Sometimes it's like taking care of their team or protecting their territory, or they're just so insecure, or they don't know how to communicate effectively or they had a bad morning. I don't know what it is. But understand what their motivation is. If it's something that they're worried it's going to be taken away or cause more problems or cause more work for them. work with them to find a solution.

If they are insecure, I'm not saying you blatantly say, *"Hey, you seem insecure. What are you insecure about?"* No. But understand what the motivation is and help them feel safe. The one thing I always say to my clients is, when people are behaving unprofessionally, it's because they feel unsafe, whether they know it or not. And our job is to create safety for everyone around us. Even when we're taking risks and doing big things, I'm not saying play it safe, I'm saying help people feel safe, even in the risky things that we do.

As long as it's not dangerous to you or your mental health and you're not sacrificing yourself in a big way, understand what makes them tick and give it to them. Help them make it safe for them. As an example, if your boss is super detailed and likes all the details and is constantly asking questions and wants to micromanage you, give them the friggin details before they ask for it. Why is that so hard? I heard so many people are like, *"I shouldn't have to do this… They're like all over me…",* blah, blah, blah. Just give them the details before they ask for it.

© SAVAGE LIFE

If someone wants details, it's because they feel unsafe. Why? Because they're worried that the team is going to fail and that they're going to look stupid. Help them feel safe. And if you're not good with details, assign it to someone on your team to give them the details every day. Or if your boss goes the other way, or the stakeholder goes the other way and they don't like detail, don't give him the detail. You might be detailed, but they're not. So every time they get an email from you, they're like, *"Oh my god, I'm not going to read this. Look at all this detail."*

Know your audience, people. Know your audience, summarize, and focus on what they need to know. Always. And if you're not good at that, delegate. Or sometimes, we have stakeholders or bosses who come up with a new idea every day of the friggin week. Then they ask you to make it happen, and then the next day, they forget they asked while you're running around trying to create this impossible thing and they forgot that they wanted that thing. This is where the trusted relationship part comes in.

If that's who you're dealing with, then just trust that's who they are and manage yourself accordingly. What's your strategy to manage someone like that? An easy one is not to action things until the next day and come back to them and just check in saying, *"I'm starting to action this thing, do you still want it? Here are some concerns that I'm going to be dealing with, are you okay with that?"* Don't bring them problems like, *"Well, this will happen and this will happen. And this will happen…"* Bring them solutions, but let them understand the impact of the solutions that you're creating.

Another example is that sometimes stakeholders aren't open to talking, meaning they talk outside the meeting. They won't say anything in the room, but then they'll go and play politics behind the scenes. If those are the stakeholders you're dealing with, just go and deal with it. Don't try to change the people. Just go to them one-on-one. *"How did you like the meeting?"* or *"I'm about to go into a meeting and here's what I'm going to talk about, what do you think? What are your concerns? You can always come to me."* Create safety. Be a trusted adviser.

Sometimes there are stakeholders who only want to communicate with people at their level. They don't want to go a level down and talk to you because that's just who they are. Don't make it a problem. Make sure that you're managing up to your boss or someone else at their level or your peers to manage up to their boss so that the person gets the right information. Just don't make it a problem. Learn what your people need in the relationship and give it to them. This isn't about you.

I know I said it is about you, but everything I'm talking about here is for you in service of you. But sometimes, we make it about us so much, that we are not able to be in service of other people, which actually works against us. So you need to do the things that are in service of you. Don't go outside of your value system, don't impact your mental health, and don't put yourself in danger, but do the things that you need to do to serve your audience so that they can play their instruments beautifully. You're orchestrating them. Orchestrate and try different stuff. I've given you lots of ideas today, but sometimes it won't work so you have to access your creativity and just keep trying shit until something sticks. Meet the people where they are.

Now, a couple of things. This kind of goes without saying, but I'm going to say it anyway. When you're managing up, just support them. When you're meeting them where they are, just support them, meaning don't complain, don't gossip, don't wish they were different because that's just going to create struggle for you. Just accept them for who they are, and have their back, meaning don't shit talk them behind their back. Have their back, support them, and have them trust you. I'm not saying don't challenge them. But once you leave the room, you support them.

© SAVAGE LIFE

Then the other one is, as I said, you got to also take care of yourself, meaning don't service people to the point where you're putting yourself in danger. You need to have some boundaries. If this person wants you to work 24/7 and you don't want to do that, you need to put some boundaries in place. Stick to your boundaries and help them understand your boundaries. We still need to train people on how to work with us. That's number one, managing the relationship.

Now, managing the work. And I kind of covered a little bit of the work with some of the examples as well. Once you're on your way to creating this positive relationship with your boss or your stakeholders, it obviously makes it way easier to get the work done and way easier to create this environment for results to happen because that's your job. And once you've spent the time giving people what they need, then you can use them. When I say use them, I'm not saying use them in a bad way. I'm saying leverage them. It's probably the best word I can give you there.

You can leverage them to help you get your job done because you're still the orchestrator. When you need them to play their instrument, you can call on them to play their instrument. And sometimes it's informing them. Sometimes it's asking them to do things. You are a person who creates the environment and clears the path for things to happen and that will include asking them to clear the path because it's not something that you can do on your own. Or it can be offering perspective. Or it can be nudging people like where they have influence and you don't, and you need to sort of borrow from their influence. Or like I said, getting people on the side ahead of time.

When you've taken the time to nurture the relationship and give them what they need to be successful and feel safe, then when it comes to your work and what you need to get done, you can much more easily leverage them to clear the path for you and your team. And this includes, by the way, being a follower. I don't think we talk enough about followership because followership is a really important part of leadership.

When I talked about it just briefly a few seconds ago. I think I'd said something once you leave the room, you have their back. What I'm talking about here, though, is that you can be in the room and offer your perspective. Disagree once, maybe twice, depending on how the conversation is going. After that, you might be in danger of being considered difficult or argumentative. It depends on how you're handling it. But followership is really about sharing your opinion, and then once the decision is made, you're 110% on board with the decision.

You're not walking out of the room and going, *"Oh, that was a really bad decision. They should have done my thing. I'm so much smarter*." You wouldn't say it that way, but in your brain, you're like, *"That's dumb, do it my way."* Or *"This is going to be a big mistake."* No. followership is about sharing your opinion, and then once a decision is made, you just get on board and you make it happen. And you don't stick to your own opinion. Your job now as a leader is to get everybody on board with the decision that was made, even if it wasn't your idea, or what you thought was the right decision. That's also how you manage the work and how you manage the relationship as well.

I recommend defining a clear strategy of who you need to manage the work with, how and how often, and then execute that consistently. Same with the relationships. What are the key relationships that you have to nurture? And make sure that you're doing that consistently as well.

The third area that I want to offer you is managing your career. Obviously, everything I've talked about mostly is about getting the work done inside the organization. But let's not forget why you're here in the first place. You're here for your career. The job that you have right now in this organization is just a tool that you're using towards building your career if you have a career plan, if you're doing you're managing your career effectively. So if you do

© SAVAGE LIFE

the first two things I talked about well, then managing your career in this organization is partly addressed, but not totally. So I'm not going to talk about how to manage your career outside the organization in this podcast.

But when you're managing the relationships and you're managing the work, then there's a certain knowledge that you are worthy of more in the organization, but you can't leave it to their timeline and when they decide that you're ready. When it comes to the work and the relationships, for instance, and the work that you're doing in the role that you've been assigned, there is a power dynamic and you're not the authority. But when it comes to your career, my recommendation is that you act as the authority on your career.

I would say in at least an equal footing position where you're trading work for money here. They're not in charge of your career, you are. So make sure you keep the reins. Be authentic. Talk about your achievements and other things. Talk about how you continuously and consistently self-advocate and not cheesy ways. Those are other podcasts and other places where you can get that information from me.

But you want to be not waiting around for them to think about it. You must be consistently discussing your career growth at every one-on-one, collecting your achievements, elevating what you do, and talking about what you want and when you want it within the organization. Because most of the time, your number one strategy is to grow inside the organization. For most people that I coached, they're like, *"I would love for it to be here because that would make it easier."* Yes, great, as long as there's still room for growth. But you also want to have a concurrent external growth strategy always ticking along, even when you love your job. But that's for another day like I said.

Managing up is always managing your career. It's not just for your boss, either. As you've developed these relationships with key stakeholders, you're going to have coffee chats outside of work and outside of discussions about work or meetings about work. Pick your three or four key senior stakeholders, you're having quarterly coffee chats with them, or whatever just to talk about stuff, about how to do things better, how your department can do things better, how you can do things better, what you're looking for in your career, how you can support them, yada yada, yada, just a conversation.

You want to be planting the seeds with lots of different people so that when these folks are sitting around a talent roundtable talking about who's who and who's got high potential and who they want the next leaders to be in the organization, you need to be the top of that list. That's part of managing up as well. I always want you to be thinking about that.

In summary, managing up is about nurturing a productive relationship with your boss and all the other key stakeholders with your one-on-one relationship with them, your work relationship with them, and your career. Managing up to accelerate your career development in the organization. And important to remember more than anything else is it's your job to manage everyone. It's your job to manage everyone else as much as it is their job to manage you. Leaders manage everyone. They don't need permission to lead. You got the job. You've been given the permission. Now go out there and lead the people at all levels in the organization.

Okay, my friends, That's what I have for you this week. Have a great one. Talk to you next time. Bye for now.

Hey, if you want to simplify leadership while amplifying your value, then you need to get your hands on my free training. Head over to melsavage.com/simple for instant access to the training and get a taste of how I help my clients lead with ease and make more money in the process. I'll see you there.

© SAVAGE LIFE