

Your quick guide to:

Managing multiple bosses

These days, it's common for PAs and EAs to have to manage a number of bosses at once. And doing this is unmistakably different from managing just one. This guide provides some simple tips to make your juggling act a little easier.

Get a clear understanding of the hierarchy

You may be managing people who are all identical in terms of seniority, but it's unlikely.

You need to understand the hierarchy you're working within. Get a clear view of who is the most senior of your bosses, and therefore, who comes first when you're snowed under.

And whatever is agreed, make sure that everyone you manage is clear about what is decided.

Be honest

It doesn't matter how much you plan ahead, you're going to have moments when you're asked to do several things at the same time.

There's no easy way of handling these moments, because everyone wants their own priorities to be yours – it's human nature.

Above all, you have to be honest. If something has to wait, let the relevant boss know. If you have to finish something else before you complete their task, tell them. Taking on unrealistic targets won't help, nor will making up excuses.

Be prepared to manage egos

When you're managing multiple bosses, you're also managing multiple egos.

Each of your bosses will want to feel like they are your number one priority. Whether they are or not needs to be discussed and agreed. But beyond that, you need to find ways of making sure each boss feels happy with the amount of attention they're getting.

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The key to this is making sure that when you're with each boss you make sure they get your undivided attention. This is easier said than done.

You need to essentially wipe your brain clean in between commitments for different bosses. Be conscious of this, and practice doing it. Treat them like different jobs completely – and never forget that they are each very different people.

It will also help if you find time to regularly meet face-to-face with each boss.

Be exceptionally organised

Obviously, as a PA or EA, you have good organisational skills. It's a minimum requirement.

But to manage multiple bosses successfully, you have to take your organisational skills to another level. It's the only way you'll cope.

Make notes and lists, and ensure you're constantly updating them. Get your emails and diaries ship-shape, and never let volume overwhelm you.

Create a system that allows you to manage everything at once, and never veer from it.

Be creative

When the pressure is on, it's easy to get caught in the constant cycle of just ploughing through your multitude of tasks.

But sometimes, you can save time and make improvements by stepping back and thinking creatively. Are there things that one boss could learn from another? Are there any tools or techniques that could help you or your bosses?

If you can think of ways of doing things better, be confident enough to suggest them. Your job isn't just about following orders – it's about making your company more successful.

Don't push yourself too hard

Trying to please everyone can be a tiring job – physically and mentally.

It can be a very satisfying job, but it must never compromise your health or happiness. Don't let anyone take advantage of you – be firm and make sure you save some space in your life for yourself.

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