

Business School

New Business School Graduates - How to Get the Boss to Listen to You

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Interview with Jim Lukaszewski

Jim Lukaszewski is an accomplished strategic advisor and the author of [Why Should the Boss Listen to You: The Seven Disciplines of the Trusted Strategic Advisor](#). Jim recently took time to answer a few questions on how new business school graduates can get the boss' attention and respect.

In your new book, *Why Should the Boss Listen to You?*, you outline seven disciplines strategic advisors need to succeed. Can you tell us more about these disciplines?

The disciplines refer to attitudes and behaviors that, if rigorously applied, will contribute to helping you become a trusted advisor.

Be trustworthy refers to the selfless commitment required of strategic advisors. It means managing your ego, recognizing what the senior people truly need, and putting that perspective and necessity ahead of your own pet ideas. It is also about keeping confidences and recognizing your role as both a conduit and an observer for the benefit of senior management. Trust has its limits. Some bosses are unethical, overbearing, and even maniacal. Trust has to be a two-way street. When it becomes only one way, it's time to get out.

Being a verbal visionary recognizes the fact that the leaders most powerful tool is verbal skill. Individuals and organizations rarely follow memos, notebooks or handbooks. People follow and act on what they hear from leaders, and how their leadership explains things. Another reason for exceptional verbal skill is the nature of decision-making at the top of organizations. Business schools still teach that the best ideas, solutions and forward thinking are the result of the clash of ideas and the verbal confrontation between leaders and their advisors. Jack Welsch, retired CEO of General Electric, called it "The Pitch." The advisor needs an extra thick stomach lining and a sense of ego management to survive in this environment.

Develop a management perspective acknowledges that if the advisor acts only from their own point of reference, their own knowledge base, or their staff bias, they will rarely be able to give effective advice and counsel. All management problems and questions are management problems and questions, first. Most advisors have some area of special knowledge and make the mistake of interpreting every management problem through the lens of that special expertise. That's a mistake. The strategic advisor always approaches problems and issues from the manager's perspective and priorities. This is probably the single most prevalent reason why younger advisors fail. They come across so convinced that their approach is correct, often based on how they feel, rather than what the numbers say, the pattern dictates, what's actually achievable, or the manager has the tolerance to absorb. Learn to use the language of operations. It's the only way you and the boss will speak the same language at the same time.

Think strategically means the habit and discipline to constantly question all assumptions, challenge the perspective of others, look at things from a different perspective intentionally and constantly, and strive to be inconsistent. Inconsistency in strategy is a virtue. The strategist is always looking for the unexpected result, the unusual perspective, even the lessons that the obvious can teach us. The leader is the organization's chief strategist, and those around him or her need to have a strategic perspective. The goal for the strategist is to provide interesting, unusual, hopefully viable options from which the leader can choose rather than traditional, consistency bound, staff driven recommendation.

Be a window to the future requires that the advisor look for, understand, and value the information and insight provided by the patterns, issues, decisions, questions, and circumstances present. Begin now to collect information on various business issues, problems, controversies, and scenarios that could occur in the future, based on what is happening today. I refer to these often as "war story files". Collecting information systematically on a wide variety of business, and societal scenarios prepares the advisor in advance, to better understand how these events come about, and most importantly, how they will play out. This strategy enables the advisor to be a forecaster of the future with a surprising level of accuracy (around 50 percent.) Anyone who can forecast anything with this level of clarity will be kept close to the boss.

Advised constructively most advisors suffer from the "face time fallacy," the notion that the time they spend either directly with or in the proximity of top managers is indication of their value and their position. This is foolish. What really matters is the value of each minute you spend directly giving valuable, crucial advice to those who lead. The rest of it is either wasted time, or delusions of grandeur. The truly valuable advisor always talks to time, and writes to time. In English-speaking cultures we speak approximately 150 words per minute. Every document, every script, every memo should be headed by a word count to give the reader or listener a specific time estimate necessary to deal with a document and the information it contains. Chapter 9 provides a very specific, three-minute drill for giving advice. It's powerful, it's purposeful, it maximizes the use of executive time, and it will be the most important tool for getting an advisor asked back again, and asked in earlier.

Part II of the Interview with Jim Lukaszewski

Show the boss how to use your advice seems to be something not generally taught in business schools that is so essential to maximize the value of advisor/leader relationships. All leaders have advisors around them. There are various devices, and tools such as timelines, prioritized lists, checklists, and strategic questions that help bosses absorb the advisor's information. Too often advisors assume that what they're saying is so sensible, useful, and obvious, they fail to check and validate reception and understanding by the person they are advising. Failing to validate the connection between advice and action is one reason why some advisors excel and succeed and other advisors get pushed back in the back or are ignored altogether

It seems that new business school graduates could benefit from those disciplines regardless of position. Do you agree?

These disciplines are important for three powerful reasons. First, any advisor will need to be able to explain the nature of the advice given. And, to some degree, the thought processes involved. It's nice to have names for these things to be able to explain how the process works from the advisor's perspective. Second the advisor may have to defend their advice and suggestions and, once again, having a process of steps or elements and identified ingredients helps make the case and supports a process of thoughtful persuasion. Third, an important ingredient in strategic thinking is the ability to disaggregate complex issues and problems on the spot, and then to reconstruct them for discussion and argument. Too often, the less experienced advisor substitutes emotion and ego for facts, or experience-based advice. These disciplines give even the youngest practitioner, a sense of altitude, a sense of dispassion, and a sense of wisdom.

New graduates sometimes complain that their boss or co-workers do not take them seriously. Is there a way to receive instant respect from the head honcho and peers alike?

One of the most frequent questions I'm asked is whether or not a truly trusted advisor has to look more like me (male . . . over 60). I have always believed, and my experience has demonstrated that it is what comes out of your mouth in a crucial moment that matters more than age, looks, or gender. I also believe in the 95-5 rule. I first read about this rule in the writings of Price Pritchett of Dallas, Texas. He suggests that 95 percent of what we do every day has very little or no value. But there is 5 percent of what we do that really matters. My advice to all advisors, but especially to younger advisors is to focus on that 5 percent. Focus on what truly matters from the manager's perspective.

What would you say to people who are having a problem with co-workers who aren't acting like good team members? Is there an easy way to resolve the conflict without involving the boss or human resources?

First of all, being a strategic advisor is an individual activity rather than done by a team. Every time I see the phrase, "a

team of advisers" I cringe and predict a dissatisfied executive and a poorly served leader. Leadership itself is about the rather lonely activity of looking over the horizon constantly, scanning for new destinations and opportunities, then returning to the organization and explaining, showing or illustrating where the organization is headed. It is those around the leader who helped translate those strategic objectives into plans, actions, decisions, and questions. It may be that teams are assigned to deal with those particular issues, but on the issues that matter, the issues of leadership and strategy, it's more likely to be individual advisors working independently with leadership to help identify the future and what that future means.

If you could offer any piece of advice to business school graduates who want to make a good impression in their first 90 days, what would it be?

First impressions matter. Here are the ingredients managers and leaders look for, as they try to identify those who will make the greatest contribution and have the greatest future:

- Make budget or sales goals.
- Help make the plan or strategy work
- Help others succeed
- Reduce stress and tension
- Get along
- Be a finisher, get things done
- Inspire others

How can you get your boss to listen to you when you need a raise?

Easy, reread the answer to question number five above.

What if you have done your job for awhile, have a track record, and now want to change to get noticed by the boss?

Here again, old habits die hard, but they die faster if better ones replace them. These are my suggestions for a better set of habits and ones that the boss will notice:

1. Be brief, use a three-minute drill process
2. Be positive, avoid negative words and phrases
3. Suggest, rather than criticize (criticism is always negative, and remembered forever)
4. Keep confidences
5. Look for next steps and increments rather than silver bullets and big ideas
6. Be a follower rather than a detractor
7. Kill projects promptly that cannot succeed

Part III of the Interview with Jim Lukaszewski

Are there specific behaviors that turn bosses off, force them to walk away when you approach, even to hide out when you are around, or just to say no on reflex?

There are certain behaviors that are likely to cause the end of a career, certainly the end of any access at senior levels. These behavior patterns are obvious, and toxic:

1. Be a whiner
2. Talk or write about things that don't matter
3. Ignore what your boss really needs today
4. Be self-serving
5. Apply pressure to get things done that may be impossible
6. Ignore your previous mistakes, errors and bad decisions
7. Be a blame shifter

Is there any single key, powerful insight, or determining factor that makes one a trusted strategic advisor?

In the book's conclusion, as well as in the beginning, I share my belief that "table" as in, "Where is the table?" is a myth; and if there were such a place, the boss would never go there because it would be populated by all of his whiny staff functionaries, rather than strategic thinking business advisors. Business leaders do often ask me, half seriously, "Where is this table all of my staff advisors keep telling me about?", "Is it anywhere near my office?", "Do I have to go there if I find it?"

I believe that the individual advisor is the table and acts as such from the moment they arrive. The successful strategic advisor believes that when they enter the room that room is full, regardless of how many others are present in addition to the boss. It's the YOYO principle. You are on your own. As a trusted strategic advisor, you are the table.

See you there.