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The Street

How to Talk Back to Your Boss: 10 Techniques

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NEW YORK (MainStreet) Bosses often are plain dumb. They make mistakes. And those mistakes, sometimes, can make you look dumb too, which is why a key corporate survival skill is mastering the how-to of talking back to your boss.

This isn't easy. Even decent bosses will resist being told off by an underling, so this is terrain to be crossed only by the deft.

Do you fit the bill? Here are ten tips for doing this right and living to tell about it.

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* "Approach the issue from the perspective of being on the same side as your boss," advised leadership [consultant](#) Dan Markin.

This is key. Highlight your commonalities, which, in this case, is that you both want the organization to succeed.

* Choose the right medium, said April Masini, who blogs at AskApril, and her wise counsel is that often face-to-face is the way to go here while email may be a misfire. It just is too easy for an email to come across as a cocky and impudent attack on the boss.

* Know who is influencing your boss's decision, urged HR coach Denise Cooper. She explained: "Most employees think the boss can make decisions unilaterally. In organizations that's generally not true. So employees will think their boss can make decisions when they may not have the authority to do so."

Bottomline: maybe the boss was handed the decision you disagree with from on high, maybe he also thinks it is dumb, but if his hands are tied, rubbing his nose in this will only make you an enemy.

Do not proceed unless you believe that what you disagree with is in fact the boss's own [idea](#).

* Ask for permission to talk back, said career coach Kathi Elster, co-author of *Mean Girls at Work* (McGraw-Hill, 2012). She elaborated her two-step permission seeking approach: "1 - I have a strong opinion about _____. Are you open to listening? If not that's O.K. 2 - Is it O.K. to disagree? If not, I can go along with your plan."

* Avoid using the "you" word, as in, Here is why I disagree with you, urged [management](#) consultant Linda Galindo, author of *The 85% Solution* (Jossey-Bass, 2009).

Said Galindo: "It's subtle, but important, to avoid using the word 'you'. Saying 'I disagree with YOU' causes defenses to go up."

Instead say: "Here is why I don't agree."

What you are doing is avoiding creation of a 'you against the boss' division, and that is crucial, because when

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