

HOW TO CREATE
and NURTURE AUTHENTIC
BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

SPHERES

of

INFLUENCE

BRAD ENGLERT

PRAISE FOR *SPHERES OF INFLUENCE*

“With this highly readable book as a guide, emerging leaders can swiftly develop the critical career-enhancing skill of relationship building. Page after page offers practical advice and countless concrete examples of how to—and how not to—build and manage strong business relationships. *Spheres of Influence* is a must-read for anyone aspiring to or in a position of leadership.”

—Naomi Karten, author of *Managing Expectations: Working with People Who Want More, Better, Faster, Sooner, NOW!*

“This book is a beacon of wisdom for anyone seeking to build meaningful connections and authentic business relationships in the professional world. With actionable insights and genuine, heartfelt advice, it offers a road map to not only cultivate trust and rapport, but also foster enduring partnerships that form the bedrock of successful careers.”

—Steve Rohleder, chairman of the board, Cognizant

“*Spheres of Influence* is a wonderful book for emerging leaders. Its practical advice interspersed with real-life stories captivates the reader and culminates in succinct key takeaways at the end of each chapter. Brad’s breadth of leadership experience clearly comes through in this book!”

—Pallavi Verma, senior managing director, Accenture

“Brad Englert’s *Spheres of Influence* is a fast read and wonderful tutorial on building and sustaining internal and external partnerships with bosses, executive teams, peers, and direct reports. Brad provides numerous references and rich examples of how to understand your partners’ goals and aspirations, set and manage their expectations, and genuinely care about their success. I worked with Brad many years ago. Brad is the real deal, and so is *Spheres of Influence*.”

—Edward J. Ray, president emeritus and professor
of economics, Oregon State University

“*Spheres of Influence* brilliantly illustrates that in the game of life, the strongest moves are made through the power of genuine connections. Brad Englert’s book is a master class in the art of influence with heart, where relationships reign supreme!”

—Liz Aebersold, founder, Wildcard Thinking

“Brad provides a thoughtful and practical guide to help emerging leaders build effective and enduring business relationships. His views are based on front-line experiences, built over a successful career in consulting and higher education administration. He’s walked the walk!”

—Marty Cole, chairman, Sagility Health and Arrivia;
Board Member, Western Union, Western Digital,
and Wilson HCG; former chief executive, Technology
Group, Accenture; and former CEO, Cloudera

“I’ve worked in higher education, the federal government, and the corporate world, and this book is a must-read for anyone in any of these sectors. Whether it’s understanding how to work with your boss or other leaders, or managing your relationships with vendor partners, Brad provides great examples of how to navigate real situations and build trust. And, along the way, you may learn a lot about yourself—how to be a better boss and leader and how to be a better client partner.”

—Darcy W. Hardy, PhD, associate vice president for academic affairs and director, Anthology Education and Research Center

“Brad has delivered a master class in managing setbacks, fostering successful business relationships, and building a resilient business culture. His unique approach to problem-solving, underscored by grit and humility, offers a fresh perspective on how to face challenges head-on and emerge stronger. *Spheres of Influence* is not just a book about business; it’s a book about the power of the human connection in the world of business.”

—Olu Kole-James, director, global client services, VISA

“This book is a survival kit. Make the key takeaways your personal chants. Englert’s knowledge and wisdom will be a recurring lifeline as I begin my career in the federal government. The stories serve as valuable lessons of proper conduct and cautionary tales of dos and don’ts. *Spheres of Influence* unlocks personal and professional successes for you, your colleagues, managers, and customers.”

—Zane Evans, returned peace corps volunteer and master of global policy studies, LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin

“Brad Englert asserts the importance of developing authentic business relationship skills as one would any other hard skill. His clear advice and concise takeaways will put you on the right road to a leadership position.”

—Margaret Jabour, executive vice president and co-owner, Twin Liquors Fine Wine and Spirits

“In *Spheres of Influence*, Brad Englert does a masterful job of helping readers to develop trust with their colleagues and strategic partners by understanding their goals, advancing projects, and ensuring clarity of roles. He illustrates his wisdom with stories drawn from his long and successful career. This book is for anyone who wants to be a more effective communicator and partner in the workplace.”

—Art Markman, vice provost for academic affairs
The University of Texas at Austin, contributor,
Fast Company, and author of *Bring Your Brain to Work*

“Brad Englert masterfully weaves his 40 years of experience to create a playbook for professionals of all levels to successfully navigate their business relationships.”

—Christy Asyn, software development engineer, Amazon

“Professional relationships have their own set of rules, and can be the make-or-break for your professional success. *Spheres of Influence* will show you how to establish, maintain, and flourish relationships with those you work for and work with.”

—David Jabour, president,
Twin Liquors Fine Wine and Spirits

“As technology’s influence in the workplace grows, so does the challenge of managing the people it takes to make it work. By weaving together his own extensive experience with that of other experts, Brad Enlgert provides a timely and extremely useful road map on how managers can successfully engage the people they work with and work for.”

—William Shkurti, former senior vice president
for business and finance, The Ohio State University

“To become an emerging leader in your field, you need to master the hard skill of building authentic business relationships. Brad Englert shows us how to do that with practical advice, real-world stories, and clear examples. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to grow their influence, impact, and income in the business world.”

—Dennis Passovoy, assistant professor of
management, McCombs School of Business,
The University of Texas at Austin

“Go network!” they say. But how? In *Spheres of Influence*, Brad leaves no space for fluff and breaks down what you can do right now to not just “network,” but to transform strangers into allies and skeptics into believers. Useful no matter where you are in your career.”

—Gorick Ng, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling
author of *The Unspoken Rules*

“The great leadership expert John C. Maxwell said ‘Leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less.’ All great leaders and successful people know that influence is the key to success. Brad Englert gives us an amazing guide with *Spheres of Influence* on how to develop the art of influence for every type of business relationship in our lives and building healthy business relationships as an outcome!”

—Mike Lyles, international keynote speaker, author, and Maxwell Leadership Certified speaker, coach, and trainer

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First Edition

To Corliss, Eric, and Nathan

PART 1

The
**INTERNAL
SPHERE**
of
INFLUENCE



Chapter 1

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BOSS

Establishing and building an effective relationship with your boss is one of the most important hard skills in business. You need to consciously work with your supervisor in order to get the best results for them, your organization, and yourself. In my experience, your boss will appreciate you initiating a conversation regarding what is important to them and how you can help them be more successful. Some managers are good at communicating their expectations, but some are not. It is your job to seek to understand what your boss's expectations are. Managing the expectations of your supervisor avoids confusion on both sides and shows them that you are engaged and curious—both traits they look for in leaders. In order to help your boss be successful, you

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must genuinely care about their success. Demonstrate that you care by offering options to resolve problems, and by demonstrating grit and the will to succeed.

UNDERSTAND YOUR BOSS

It is your responsibility to understand the goals and aspirations of your boss. First, you need to clarify when you don't fully understand a directive. Then you need to determine your boss's goals and how you align with them. Finally, figure out what you have to offer—and offer it.

Just ask!

It is a simple step, but many of us do not take the time to ask. If you don't know or understand your manager's goals, you may focus on the wrong tasks and waste your valuable time. Simply ask: "What are your goals, priorities, and pressures?"

Many bosses have sales or project targets that increase every year. You need to understand those targets and how you can do your part to help your supervisor achieve or exceed those goals. One supervisor said that meeting these ever-growing sales targets was like "feeding a bulldog: It's always hungry and keeps getting bigger."

Your overarching goal is to not be on any list that would put your boss on a list; for example, uncollected fees, late time reports, and delinquent performance evaluations. Let's say you're an account manager. Your supervisor is probably evaluated on how timely fees are collected. Fees not collected are

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subject to additional interest charges if not billed on time. Ensuring that all of your accounts are well managed helps your supervisor be successful. In addition, time and expenses must be entered by the deadlines—no exceptions. Personnel evaluations that are your responsibility must all be completed on time. Independent quality assessments of your projects must be rated high. Compliance coursework must be completed on time. Everything you do—or don't do—reflects on your manager. This is all within your control.

One supervisor I worked with was not forthcoming. He prided himself on being a chess master, “thinking many steps ahead.” He thought that keeping his moves to himself was a strength. This technique was actually a dirty trick used to disorient and destabilize others while he consolidated power. In *The 48 Laws of Power*, Robert Greene cites “law three: Conceal your intentions: Keep people off-balance and in the dark by never revealing the purpose behind your actions. If they have no clue what you are up to, they cannot prepare a defense. Guide them far enough down the wrong path, envelop them in smoke, and by the time they realize your intentions it will be too late.”¹ If I and the boss's other direct reports had known where he was heading, we would have been better positioned to help him achieve his goals. He declined, which was frustrating for me and all of his direct reports. Don't be a boss who keeps your moves to yourself.

When you have to work for a bad manager, take note of their dysfunctional behaviors so you can avoid these toxic characteristics when you are a supervisor. Refer to Greene's *The 48 Laws of Power* to recognize the ploys being used against you. Once you recognize what you are up against, you will be in a better position

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to protect yourself. You also have to grin and bear it. If your boss has a big ego, try to get them to think your ideas are their ideas. If they won't listen to you, try to find others in the organization to support and advise you, especially if they are admired by your manager. If your boss is untruthful, there is not much you can do. By all means protect your direct reports and staff from your supervisor's dysfunctional behaviors.

You need to consciously work with your boss—if they let you—in order to get the best results for them, your organization, and yourself. In my experience, your boss will appreciate you initiating a conversation regarding what is important to them and how you can help them be more successful.

Determine how you align with your boss's goals

After you have a good understanding of your boss's goals, self-reflect on your strengths, weaknesses, and work style to determine how they can be aligned with your boss's strengths, weaknesses, and work style. Some supervisors make quick decisions, some cannot make decisions when first asked, and some have difficulty making decisions at all. Without understanding your own strengths, weaknesses, and work style, you can't align them with someone else's. There are several tools to help you with self-assessment: CliftonStrengths Assessment by Don Clifton, the SOCIAL STYLE Model by TRACOM Group, and *I-Speak Your Language* by DBM Publishing.

Is your boss a lark who works early, or a night owl who comes in later and works late? I am a night owl, so when my manager was a night owl, we were naturally aligned. When I worked for a lark, I made sure to arrive to work early to stay aligned.

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Some supervisors want to hear only the big picture, while others want to get into all the details. You need to adjust accordingly. Peter F. Drucker says in *Managing Oneself* that you need to know if your boss is “a reader or [a] listener.”² A reader will want written proposals, and a listener will prefer hearing the proposals. You will frustrate a boss if you do not know which style they prefer.

I had a boss who could not make decisions when first asked. He always needed more space and time to think, and he felt cornered when first asked to make a decision. I learned to always begin a discussion with, “I’m not asking for a decision today; I just want your input.” Then, in a second meeting, I would ask for a decision. I dubbed this approach the “Texas two-step,” and it worked well for both of us. In addition, he was not a reader. He would be terse when using email but much more welcoming when discussing issues in person. So I made sure to discuss all sensitive issues in person.

One of my best managers at the firm would challenge me with field promotions. I wanted to be a leader, and she wanted to train future leaders, so our goals aligned perfectly. She would give me opportunities for stretch roles where I could act like a manager before I was a manager. Later in my career, she asked me to serve in executive roles while I was still a senior manager. The brilliance of this approach is that I could try new roles knowing that when I encountered challenges, there was no harm, no foul. Stretch roles were treated as lower-risk learning experiences. The added benefit of this approach was to build confidence in myself and my supervisor that I would be successful at the next level. You don’t want to be promoted too early only to fail.

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Offer your services

What do you enjoy and excel at? I was attracted to strategy work. Helping organizations understand where they are and articulate where they want to be in three to five years was fun and rewarding. Nearly all of the strategy projects I worked on resulted in follow-on engagements that grew the pie for my boss and myself. Because I enjoyed it and was good at it, I offered this skill to my manager.

I also enjoyed leading the development of client proposals. Writing a proposal is a grueling assignment, often with a short deadline. Proposal development is costly and can easily degenerate into a death march. However, with a well-thought-out plan, it is possible to create a high-quality proposal on time and within budget. Successful proposals articulate that we truly understand the client's request, convey fresh ideas and approaches, and propose a talented team to solve their business problems in a cost-effective way.

Once, I saw a public notice that a large public entity was going to award strategy work to a competitor "unless a better proposal was received." I suggested to my manager that we submit a better proposal and offered my services. We were happily surprised when we were selected to do the strategy work, which led to three lucrative follow-on projects.

Understanding what I enjoyed and excelled at led to volunteering to lead strategy work and creating successful proposals. This resulted in more work for my company, which helped my supervisor—and me—achieve our ever-increasing sales targets. This was the best approach for me. However, you need to determine which of your strengths can help your boss be most successful. It is your responsibility to ask your manager what their goals

and aspirations are, and after self-reflection, to offer how you can help achieve those goals. Do not be on any list that would put your supervisor on a list. And remember, when you become the boss, to proactively share your goals and aspirations with your direct reports. Hey, they are not mind readers.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Some managers are good at communicating their expectations, but some are not. It is your job to seek to understand what your boss's expectations are. The following steps will help you manage the expectations of your boss.

Say "Whoa!"

One of my bosses had a type A personality: She worked fast, liked control, was highly competitive, and had a strong desire to succeed. Nine times out of ten, when you were called to her office, you were anticipating that something was wrong, and you steeled yourself for some verbal tough love.

Naomi Karten's book *Managing Expectations: Working with People Who Want More, Better, Faster, Sooner, NOW!* offers pragmatic advice on how to manage expectations and dramatically improve your effectiveness. Karten holds a BA and an MA in psychology and has extensive experience in technical, customer support, and management positions. After reading her book, I was able to better set expectations and maintain a greater balance between my professional and personal life. For example, when appropriate, say "whoa" to your supervisor.³ Saying no is usually not well-received,

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especially with those managers with type A personalities. Saying “whoa,” however, creates some time and space to truly understand what the boss is asking you to do. Slow the conversation down, and make sure you understand what is being asked.

The day after reading Karten’s book, my type A boss called me at five p.m. with what, at first, appeared to be an urgent request. I was actually trying to leave the office on time for once to meet my wife for dinner. She sputtered, “I need a white paper—A WHITE PAPER on function point analysis! Do you know what that is?”

After taking a deep breath, I literally said, “Whoa!” and asked, “When do you need this?”

She abruptly stopped and paused to check her calendar: “Um, I need it in two weeks. Yes, I meet with the client again in two weeks.”

I was thinking she needed it the next day. Taking the time to clarify expectations gave us both some much-needed mental space and reduced the stress of an imaginary tight deadline.

Then I asked, “How many pages should this white paper be?”

“Three to five,” she replied.

I was thinking 10 pages, so again, saying “whoa” made the request clearer.

“Do you have an example of what you are looking for?”

“Yes. Ask Daniel for a copy of a white paper on XYZ corporation that I wrote ten years ago.”

I smiled and left the office on time knowing that I would be able to enlist my staff to help the next morning. We had plenty of time to conduct the research and draft the white paper for the boss’s review well before the client meeting.

Before I learned how to manage my supervisor’s expectations

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by saying “whoa,” I would have cancelled dinner with my wife, frustrating her and upsetting me, worked all night to develop a 10-page white paper, and the next day gotten yelled at for not meeting my boss’s expectations. That’s a lose–lose–lose proposition all the way around.

Instead, with all that information, my supervisor’s request was more manageable, I had a model to follow, and the deadline was further out than I had imagined. I never would have known if I hadn’t had the courage to say “whoa.” This was a turning point in the relationship with my supervisor, which gave me insight into how I needed to be clear on setting expectations and deadlines when I became the boss.

Set expectations from the outset

It is critical to set expectations from the outset with a new manager. It avoids confusion on both sides and shows them that you are engaged and curious—both traits they look for in leaders.

One of my new supervisors had a direct report peer of mine, Frank, who was the boss’s close and trusted confidant. They had worked together for 13 years, and I was new. Early on, my boss would clearly seek and often take advice from Frank on many aspects of my department: budget, personnel, and policies. Frank would give advice that he didn’t have the expertise to give, and he even started to create conflict where there wasn’t any.

Some of my boss’s emails giving me orders were clearly ghostwritten by Frank. Emails actually written by my supervisor, often via his mobile phone, were short, all caps, with no subject line. Frank’s ghostly emails were confusing clouds of words, sent by my supervisor minutes after the two of them had met.

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(I would check Frank's calendar to confirm the timing.) One email from my manager actually said, "I am not sending you this note because someone has whispered this in my ear." This dysfunctional work dynamic was both hilarious and sad. I always wondered if I would have an opportunity to ghostwrite email orders from the boss to Frank, but that never happened.

In a one-on-one meeting with my boss, I drew on a sheet of paper three heads with headsets all connected with coiled wires. Below the first head, I wrote, "offensive coordinator." Below the middle head, I wrote, "head coach." And below the third head, I wrote, "defensive coordinator." Then I said, "You are the head coach. Frank is your long-time, trusted offensive coordinator, and I am the new defensive coordinator. Your job is to hold Frank accountable for the offense (his department) and to hold me accountable for the defense (my department). When I get Frank's orders through your headset, you no longer need me. So, I expect that from now on you will hold Frank accountable for his domain and me accountable for my domain." My supervisor understood and thanked me for the "open and honest feedback." I set expectations for what I was comfortable with, and my boss embraced the feedback.

You are responsible for setting clear expectations with your supervisor from the outset, especially if you find yourself in a dysfunctional relationship. You must stand up for yourself in a professional and respectful way.

Be honest if you cannot help

In any relationship, sometimes you do need to say no. If you do not have the experience or skills to take on a role, you need to be

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honest. Say you cannot help, and offer recommendations on who would be a better fit for the opportunity. Recognizing the talents of others is part of becoming a leader, and a good manager will appreciate your honesty and your willingness to promote the best outcome for the team rather than yourself.

If you have prior family commitments, you owe it to your family and yourself to use your words and say no. As I mentioned earlier, I'm embarrassed to say that I cancelled several of my family vacations over the years due to my poor planning and expectation setting. Thanks to Naomi Karten, I learned the skill of how to take vacations and fulfill family commitments. Communicating early and often with your boss about family obligations gives everyone plenty of time to make backup plans. Reminding your supervisor each month leading up to the vacation helps everyone avoid surprises. I still feel guilty about asking one of my direct reports to cancel a vacation—which I did one time in 30 years. That was a mistake and was the direct consequence of me failing to think ahead.

Whether it's a family commitment or a mismatch of skills, a good manager will appreciate your honest admission that you're not a good fit for a project. Don't just say yes to everything; think about it, and make sure you can do a great job.

Be accountable and hold your boss accountable

You are responsible for meeting the expectations of your supervisor, as well as holding them accountable for providing the support and resources you need to be successful. This is easier said than done. If you are not provided the resources necessary to fulfill your organization's obligations, then you may fail at

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a project or goal. You are responsible for clearly communicating to the boss which obligations will no longer be met due to resource constraints they imposed. Be sure to communicate early to give your supervisor enough time to respond.

One time, my supervisor delayed the approval of the funding for the annual maintenance of some mission-critical assets. I wrote an email to her documenting that her decision to not fund this maintenance would put the enterprise at great risk and in default of state law. She then approved the funding. It's possible that she didn't see the consequences of her inaction, and holding her accountable helped both of us—and the enterprise—meet our responsibilities and goals.

Transparency

No one likes to be surprised, so err on the side of overcommunicating. Meet on a consistent basis to build trust and foster transparency. As issues arise, be sure to escalate when necessary. It is far better to seek your manager's advice to proactively address issues than to blindsides them later. As Robert Vlastic, who headed the family-owned company of Vlastic pickles, often said, "Give me good news fast and bad news faster."⁴

Manage expectations with your supervisor by seeking to understand what is being asked, setting expectations from the outset, being honest about whether you can or cannot help, and fostering mutual accountability and transparency. Each of these mutual skills will reinforce your relationship, and they'll help you both ensure success.

GENUINELY CARE ABOUT THE SUCCESS OF YOUR BOSS

It is important for you to help your boss be successful—that is part of your own success. By exceeding expectations, you not only make yourself look good but make them look good as well. In order to do that, you must genuinely care about their success. You and your supervisor plus others who report to her are a team. You need to support your boss and others on the management team to achieve the best results for the organization.

Offer options to resolve problems

When presenting your manager with a problem, be prepared with several options to resolve the problem. You are closest to an issue and are best positioned to think through alternative approaches. Be patient and take the time to determine the root causes of the problem. Discussing the pros and cons of options to resolve problems with your supervisor is a great way to create collaborative solutions. If you arrive empty-handed, the boss will feel like she has to do all the thinking and will wonder why you are working for her. If you instead come prepared with solution options, you'll prove your value. You may not have the perfect answer, but your manager will appreciate that you didn't leave all the thinking to her or corner her into the role of being a rescuer.

Enlist support

There is no shame in asking your manager for help. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Not asking for help when you need it often leads to disaster. Sometimes, you need help to reign in the scope

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of a project. Other times, you may need more time to complete an initiative with quality. Often, more resources are required. In my experience, most supervisors welcome this discussion. However, some are not open to providing the requested support. In that case, you still need to explain why the support is needed and the consequences of not providing it.

One organization's leader had this mantra: "There's no money!" So, his direct reports and their teams stopped asking for the resources necessary to support the enterprise. Over time, needed equipment replacement was neglected, maintenance was out of support, and in some cases, the work environment was unsafe. Staff training was cut, and the entire organization's morale plummeted, resulting in poor service delivery. In reality, there were ample funds, but the egocentric leader set all the priorities. Instead of being cowed, his direct reports should have enlisted the boss's support to change the priorities and explain the consequences and risks of not doing so. Not replacing equipment at the end of its life or maintaining it led to unpredictable, high-profile outages that put the entire enterprise at risk. The boss's priorities finally shifted in order to prevent further embarrassing and costly unplanned outages, but the fiascos could have been entirely avoided if the team had stepped up and intervened earlier.

One team leader had the courage to let her manager know that she had a number of concerns. In a heartbreaking email to the boss, she said, "I am personally dissatisfied with the quantity and quality of my work over the past nine months. I don't think that I am doing the job you desire nor the department deserves. I still feel some pushback from my direct reports. It feels like they want to hear from you directly, rather than accept my direction and decisions. Many times, I have led them to this perspective