

How to Talk to Your Manager about Being Overwhelmed with Your Workload

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One of the toughest conversations you can have with your manager: letting her know you're overwhelmed by your workload. It's easy to slip into the trap of feeling like you're accepting defeat and saying you can't do your job—but in fact, this conversation can improve your relationship with your supervisor and demonstrate how you've matured as an employee. It just takes the right approach.



Choose The Right Moment

The right time for this conversation is not when you're tired or on the verge of tears—or when your boss is short on time. Save the emotions for your closest non-work confidante, and make a game plan for attacking the issue with your manager. Request time on his calendar to review and prioritize your current projects.

Be Prepared With Solutions

You can't walk into this meeting empty-handed. Prepare yourself by writing a list of your current projects, from large to small. Don't leave anything off, even those routine monthly tasks. Assign each project a current status, and prioritize them in order of importance based on your perspective.

Think about how you would handle this situation if you were in your boss's shoes. For instance, could some of these tasks be delayed while you tackle a pressing one-time project, like a website redesign? Is it possible to bring in help from another department or a temp agency? Can the frequency of ongoing tasks be reduced from monthly to quarterly, even for a short time?

The main point is, you don't want to walk in without solutions. If you enter the room without some forward-looking ideas, it will be easy for your boss to doubt your ability to handle your responsibilities. But if you have a plan and present the conversation as an opportunity to clarify expectations and ensure you're on the same page as your supervisor, you retain your reputation for being responsible and mature. You're fully capable of doing your job—there are only so many hours in a day.

Use Your Words Carefully

Again, it's all in the phrasing. "I just can't do it anymore!" sounds a lot different than "I have a lot on my plate right now. Will you please review my project list with me to verify I've prioritized my tasks according to our department's current needs?" The former is a desperate cry for help; the latter shows you're a levelheaded employee who has the bigger picture in mind. Plus, it plays to your supervisor's need to manage her own workload. After all, she is ultimately responsible for making sure the work gets done, and if you aren't able

to do it, she has to find someone who is. It takes a lot less time—and money—to assist an already-trained employee than it does to [hire and train a replacement](#).

Speak Up Before You Get To A Breaking Point

It can be tempting to suffer in silence when you're feeling overwhelmed, whether you're hesitant to say something out of fear of being perceived as weak or a sense of martyrdom. But staying silent is the worst thing you can do, especially if you like your position overall. Eventually, you'll get to a breaking point, and your supervisor's reaction is likely to be, "Why didn't you say something sooner?" At that point, you may be too burned out to reshuffle and move forward our way through a season of stress.

Speaking up about a too-burdensome workload is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it's a sign of maturity. If your supervisor won't work with you to find solutions, it's time to start looking elsewhere for a role that better suits your needs and ability to contribute.

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