



Roundtable Mentor,  
**Barbara Pepin**, Senior  
Director Data Management  
& Product Onboarding  
at Indigo, shared her  
strategies for dealing  
with a stressful situation  
involving multiple levels of  
management.

## Mentoring **MATTERS**

**Q**

*I'm currently working on a project for my boss's boss and it's causing issues. My boss isn't getting along with his boss and I feel caught in between. How can I manage both agendas (which seem to be conflicting!)*

It is never fun to be in the middle of someone else's conflict. It is especially uncomfortable when they are your leaders. I have worked more than once where there was a conflict of opinion and values between leaders of my team or my organization. At some point, it will happen to most of us. My key learning is that I had choices. I could choose to ignore it and try to work around it, confront it or walk away from the role.

In the end, I discovered the short term discomfort of tackling the situation head on is far less stressful in the long term.

Sometimes your first instinct is to leave your leaders to work it out between them. After all, they are leaders right? They should know how to deal with conflict. Unfortunately, sometimes they are bosses or managers but not leaders. Leaders would not let the conflict get to a point where it impacts their teams.

So now you are at the cusp. It's up to you to take next steps or decide you can ignore it. Let's agree together to take action. There is no single right path but here are some suggestions.

### *Reflect on the situation*

Reflect on the opportunity to work with your leader once removed. Is it aligned with corporate objectives and with your values? What do you want to achieve to support your growth within the project and by learning to deal conflict? Is there anything you are bringing to the table that might be aggravating the situation? Knowing why you want to tackle the situation and what you want to get out of it is important.

## *Talk to your peers*

It's a great time to reach out to your peer support network within your team and from other people in your organization. Hopefully you have invested time before now in developing that network. Ask them for their perspective on the issue. Is the conflict impacting them? What have they tried and how has it worked? What is their perception of the opportunity you have been given?

## *Plan your conversation*

Your reflection and peer conversations helped you get ready. Now it's time to plan for action. Do you want to start with separate conversations with each of them or would it be best to get it out on the table all together? Prep some open ended questions. What are their perceptions of the situation? Is the project the source of the misalignment? What suggestions do they have about your feelings of conflict?

## *Take Action*

Don't get stuck in planning mode. You can let that voice in your head spin so you stay forever prepping and never get down to it. Gather your courage, walk in to their office and start talking.



**Barbara Pepin** has worked in various roles within process optimization and operations. She currently works for Indigo Books & Music. Barb blends collaborative partnerships with actionable solutions. This takes her into an ever changing mix of teams which leads occasionally into situations of conflict.



**Glain Roberts-McCabe** is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.