Transitioning from buddy to boss can often be a daunting and difficult task. Working and personal relationships can become strained when a “buddy” is suddenly promoted to “boss.” Friends and coworkers will have a variety of different attitudes related to your promotion as supervisor in the department. Some people will be happy for you while others may be surprised, angry, or even jealous. They may question your qualifications for the position or why you were selected for the promotion before them. Being able to maintain balance between your role as a boss and your role as a friend will help to create a positive working environment for all employees.

Balancing the roles of supervisor and friend will not be easy. As a supervisor, one of your responsibilities is to maintain a professional environment where employees work productively and are treated fairly. Working with friends can make this task very difficult to achieve. Friends often expect special treatment or will not work as hard simply because their friend is the boss. Many researchers differ on whether friends can separate business relationships from personal relationships. Some research indicates that it is not possible to maintain a friendship once a buddy becomes boss. Generally, people find it difficult to differentiate what is acceptable in an office environment from what is acceptable in a personal friendship. Friends may feel that they can “get away” with not doing their work and take advantage of the fact that the boss is their buddy. Sometimes, friends expect special treatment simply because they knew you before you became the boss which can place you in a difficult position. As a supervisor, you will need to determine how to handle the situation. Can you solve this problem and still maintain your friendship? Other research indicates that if you can take certain steps and establish boundaries in your relationships then you can keep your friendships and still maintain a positive and fair working environment for all your employees.

As a supervisor, are you equipped to maintain friendships and still be a good boss? Can you differentiate your work relationships from personal relationships? How can you become an effective leader and still maintain friendships? When buddies become bosses, it is important to:

- Establish guidelines that separate your role as a boss from your role as a friend.
- Ensure that special treatment is not given to your friends.
- Evaluate each employee’s work based on an established set of criteria.
- Disseminate information to employees at one time. Don’t tell your friend first and expect it to remain between friends. Other employees may feel resentful that the boss’s pet always knows things first.

As supervisors, how we treat our employees goes a long way in promoting a positive working environment. Maintaining a friendly environment can have a positive impact on the morale and productivity of your department. Not only does the employee feel that you care but, as a supervisor, you can get an idea for what is happening in the department. You are more able to spot and solve potential problems before they become bigger issues. While establishing and
maintaining friendships with your employees can have a positive effect on the department, there can also be a down-
side for the unsuspecting supervisor. It is often difficult or even impossible to give a performance evaluation to a 
friend. There is no easy way to tell a friend when they are not meeting the set standards. Disciplining a friend for 
poor performance can lead to resentment and anger. If your friend is not able to see past the anger, then it may be 
necessary to maintain a working relationship only. Remember that failing to discipline an employee, even a friend, 
who is not performing up to standards can lead to greater problems. Other employees may see you as an ineffective 
supervisor and may not listen to you or respect your decisions.

Some ways to gain employee respect and maintain a positive working environment would be to:

◆ Explain what you expected of each employee or friend and establish one clear set of guidelines for everyone.
◆ Maintain an open door policy. Let your employees know that you are available to listen to their concerns.
◆ Encourage all employees to excel in their positions.
◆ Give employees constant feedback so they know what they are doing correctly and what needs improvement.
◆ Treat all employees with respect and give them an equal amount of your time.
◆ Make gradual changes. If possible, explain the reason for changes, employees may be more receptive to 
them.
◆ Be a role model for your employees. Expect more from yourself than you do from your employees.

Some things a supervisor should never do would be to:

◆ Favor one employee over other employees.
◆ Fail to correct employee problems when first noticed or discipline employees differently for the same actions.
◆ Make decisions based on emotions.

Whether you are hiring a friend, simply changing positions or departments, or a first time supervisor of a friend, 
maintaining a balance between your professional relationships and your friendships can be achieved if both parties set 
and follow established guidelines. Remember that it takes hard work to cultivate positive working relationships but 
in the end you and your department can benefit from maintaining a friendly environment. We hope that this informa-
tion will help you in creating a balanced and positive working environment for all employees.