Who’s the Boss? A speaking activity to practice the passive causative

Directions for the teacher:

STEP 1 – Ask students for job titles that reflect authority. Who gives orders and gets things done? Give “department head” as one example. Other possibilities: supervisor, office manager, project manager, vice-president, director, CEO, owner, company president, program coordinator, executive chef, chief of staff, head designer. Create a list on one side of the board.

STEP 2 – Ask students to call out types of companies or places of work where a number of employees must be supervised each day and where many decisions get made on a daily basis. Suggestions: restaurant, clothing store, car factory, language school, advertising agency. Create a second list next to the list of job titles.

STEP 3 – Have students work in pairs. Assign them a place of work and ask them to choose a job title for themselves. They must write down a list of at 4-5 things they got done today. Each statement must use the passive causative: subject + causative verb + object + past participle + (agent). Example: We got the copy machine fixed. Create a third list on the board of causative verbs often used in the passive: have, get, want, need.

STEP 4 – Have the same pairs use their statements to create a dialog in which one person is reporting to the other.

Example A:
(owner) “Did we get the copy machine fixed?”
(office manager) “Yes, I had it repaired this morning. It’s working fine now.”

Example B:
(owner) “Did we get the copy machine fixed?”
(office manager) “No, not yet. I couldn’t get anyone to repair it today.”
(owner) “I want it fixed tomorrow. Please see that it gets done.”

STEP 5 – Have students role play their dialogs for the class. The boss can be demanding or understanding. Encourage drama!