

Be a Motivator: 10 Tips for Being a Better Boss

By

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Natural leaders find that it is relatively easy to succeed at being bosses. Others may not start out well in their new roles, but get the coaching, mentoring, and training they need to grow into excellent bosses. Still others are just not cut out to be bosses at all. This article shares 10 insights into how bosses can be their best, which in turn will help them create highly functioning teams.

Good bosses possess a self-awareness of how their behavior and persona affect people. Unfortunately, many organizations promote employees who are not prepared to be bosses. These promotions can happen for numerous reasons: Perhaps the person excelled in their previous role and management assumed they'd be able to take the next step. Or, as is often the case with younger generations in the workforce, they expect to be promoted after a very limited amount of time (as far as the older generations are concerned, at least), and management promotes them because they fear these employees will move on to other opportunities.

Often the newly promoted boss is not mentored on how to perform as a leader. Some new bosses are not emotionally prepared and are unnecessarily heavy-handed and autocratic with those who report to them. Others are happier doing the work themselves than having to manage people. Others are "tone deaf" to feedback from co-workers.

Who Can Benefit from This Article?

If you aspire to be a boss, then this article will benefit you. If you are an experienced boss, read this article carefully. Unless you are actively engaged in improving your leadership skills, such as professional coaching, 360-degree reviews, or other such exercises and investments, you may be missing something crucial about your leadership style that is holding back your team. If you have surrounded yourself with "Yes People" who never disagree with you or present contrary opinions, that's a red flag that you need to improve your management skills.

Why Did I Aspire to Become a Boss?

My ambition to become a boss was never about more money, prestige, or a title. My ambition to become a boss was simply that some of my bosses -- not all -- were incompetent and never should have been bosses. These subpar bosses were unaware of how their behavior affected subordinates or how they could improve their leadership style. I finally concluded, "I can do better than this and I need to be promoted."

Ten Suggestions on Being a Successful Boss

The following is a list of insights that may help you succeed as a boss, presented in no particular order. Take your time reading this list, thinking about how you are either engaging in these activities, or if you aren't, then why not? Determine what you can start doing immediately.

Discuss this with others around you, especially if you are part of a peer group of people who are not in your organization and can give you candid feedback. Be honest with yourself. All self-improvement requires some vulnerability. It's time to put the ego aside and get to work. You'll be a better boss for it.

1. *Empathize with all who work for you:* OK, you have heard this suggestion many times, but it bears repeating, as it is easy to forget when you are pressed for time or stressed. It's a fundamental aspect that will help you succeed as a boss. Remember that people have full, complex lives outside their jobs, and sometimes those lives get messy. If a previously high-performing individual is struggling – say, missing deadlines or producing subpar work – find out what's going on with them. Don't get heavy-handed about how they're messing up everything and put them on the defensive. Ask them how they are doing. Respect their boundaries – and do this all in a way that your Human Resources and/or legal teams would condone – but try to dig a little. They might volunteer information that can give you insight into their situation and you can come up with a solution that's better for the employee and for your organization.
2. *Trust the people who report to you to do the job:* Assume that they are capable and will do the job. Don't micromanage. Articulate your expectations clearly, including who is doing what parts of projects, the deadlines involved, and when to inform you if anything looks like it will not be completed as expected. Don't assume that they can read your mind! If they are not performing to your expectations, find out why and help them to improve. A boss's job is to remove roadblocks, not create them. When you hire talented, driven people, you can then get out of their way and let them do the job.
3. *Recognize accomplishment:* Give praise when it is due, either personally or in a more public forum. Respect HOW people want to be praised: Some prefer a private note of appreciation, others want a ticker tape parade, and still others want more responsibility. Giving praise for a job well done costs nothing. I've had bosses who never recognized accomplishments. I often thought that such bosses felt that if they praised subordinates that they would slack off, or they were afraid that people would ask for a raise. My own experience has been that when I received praise I worked harder because my good work was appreciated. Be sure, though, to praise a person in a way that doesn't insult someone else. I've known bosses who will lavish praise on a person for doing a project, saying things like, "You did it so much better than last time," while the person who managed the previous project was in the same room. That was embarrassing and awkward for the person being praised and demoralizing for the person who had just been insulted.
4. *Look for promotable staff:* You will always have capable people working for you. Which of these people can be promoted? Help them to get a promotion, either in your department or elsewhere in your organization. That might involve sending them to classes to learn what's needed for the next stage of their career, or to some leadership training, or getting them a professional coach. Investing in the people around you and seeing them succeed means that YOU are succeeding. You will make a friend and ally in doing so, and others will see that you care about the people who report to you and want to work for you. They will be motivated to succeed. Don't block others from getting ahead. (See number 5 on mentoring.)

5. *Mentor high-potential individuals:* Mentoring can be one of the most satisfying parts of working. Mentoring takes time when done well, so you can't mentor everyone reporting to you. In some cases, mentors in other departments or other companies (not competitors) may be a good fit for the people you can't mentor yourself. People will appreciate the investment you make in their success. And, who knows, perhaps someday the person you previously mentored may hire you when you need a job.
6. *Allow for individual differences:* If you have been a boss, you know that people can be contentious, stubborn, loquacious, reserved, malleable, ambitious, brilliant, and many other traits. Try to figure out what sort of personality you are dealing with and approach the person accordingly. The ability to "read" people will help you with all your interactions. A real game-changer can be having your team take a personality profile assessment such as DiSC, then getting properly trained on the different types of people and how to communicate with each other. If you are a bottom-line type of person (the "D" or Direct personality), you probably get frustrated by people telling you many details before getting to the point. If those people know that you are a D, they will start out with the bottom line, and then be able to provide the details you need as you ask them for any additional input. When your team knows this about each other, all of you will be able to adapt and use the styles most appropriate for working together.
7. *Welcome any criticism from your team and TAKE IT SERIOUSLY:* As I mentioned earlier, if you are surrounded by "Yes People," it's a red flag that you are not open to criticism. Ask yourself why that is. Are you insecure? Do you feel that you're a fraud and that others would do your job better? Hiding from these issues doesn't make them go away. It's a little trite, but the saying "the worst problem is the one you aren't aware of" rings true. Ask for feedback. Listen openly and non-judgmentally, don't get defensive or engage in any kind of retaliatory actions. Process the message. It may just help you to become a better boss. Your team will feel better about you if you allow them to be straightforward with you. Ensure that the exchange is not heated and remains respectful.
8. *Observe how other successful bosses lead and also learn from subpar bosses:* We are the sum total of our experiences, and many of us have had great bosses – who inspire us and we want to emulate – while others were terrible. Bad bosses show us what NOT to do. When my time came to become a boss, I drew on my experiences with all my former bosses. Then I blended the best of the best role models and eschewed the worst of the worst bosses from my past.
9. *Seek suggestions from those who work for you:* Ask for suggestions on how to solve a problem or improve a process or introduce a new product. This is not a sign of weakness. Those closest to the work usually have the best ideas for problem solving.
10. *Don't make changes for change's sake if you are new to a department or a company.* You may need to make changes and that's why you were hired or promoted. However, don't be the proverbial bull in the china shop and come in with a slash-and-burn approach. You will not get support from your team and all your changes will be unpopular, even if they had an excellent chance of success if you'd handled the situation differently. Pay attention to how things currently work, spend time with your subordinates, ask questions, and discover what is going on. Listen carefully and nonjudgmentally. Then you can formulate a plan to improve operations and performance.

Conclusion

Some people are born leaders. They are brilliant, charismatic, and easily get people on board with their visions (think Steve Jobs). Others need to learn how to be great bosses, and they get the necessary training to develop those skills. They may not revolutionize industries, but they will do a great job and inspire others. Still others should never be bosses in the first place. This article explored 10 insights that can help anyone become a better boss, whether they currently manage others or they aspire to do so. If you were at all uncomfortable reading about any of these behaviors, or noticed yourself in any of the examples of what not to do, I recommend that you engage in some further self-reflection and get the guidance you need to become a better boss. If you're just starting out in your career, I hope that these insights have given you a head start on your success.

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