

Do's and Don'ts of a Great Boss

Dan Reiland

The Pastor's Coach

January 2011, Article # 2

If you were to describe the best boss you've ever had, how would you describe them? Tough but fair? Caring and a good listener? Competent and trusting? There are so many possibilities, and one of the most difficult things about being a great boss is that everyone would like something just a little different.

Some employees like their boss for reasons far removed from the actual function of an employer. "He lets me leave early every Tuesday so I can take my kid to soccer practice." Or, "She paid for my trip to New York." Generous, yes, but these kinds of things generally fall more under the category of a "nice person" and not necessarily a "good boss."

I know the word boss meets with different opinions. In the 90's "boss" was out and "team leader" was in. Every 5-10 years there is a new preference. I'm not sure what is "in" right now. My twenty-something friends say it doesn't really matter, just keep it short and simple – so "boss" it is at least for this edition of the Pastor's Coach. This article is in many ways a declaration that it doesn't matter what word you use, from supervisor to manager, there are good leaders and bad ones – and a few in between who are just average. If you are responsible for one employee, dozens, or hundreds I'm sure you want to be a great boss.

I've had the leadership role of a "boss" for a long time. Some days are better than others, and I see it as a privileged responsibility and sacred trust – but I don't take myself too seriously. That's important – don't take yourself too seriously.

Check out these quotes.

"A Harvard Medical School study has determined that rectal thermometers are still the best way to tell a baby's temperature. Plus, it really teaches the baby who's boss." Tiny Fey

"Accomplishing the impossible means only that the boss will add it to your regular duties." Doug Larson



© 2011 THE JOHN MAXWELL COMPANY, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without written permission.

“By working faithfully eight hours a day you may eventually get to be boss and work twelve hours a day.” Robert Frost

“No man goes before his time – unless the boss leaves early.” Groucho Marx

OK, enough of those! I trust that the following “Do’s and Don’ts” are helpful to you. Don’t treat your employees like hired hands.

One of the most basic needs of a human being is to be treated with respect.

Regardless of the status of a person’s job, a good boss interacts with each person in a way that communicates dignity.

There are several simple but meaningful ways to do this. First, listen. A leader (boss) can communicate so much through the simple act of genuinely listening. It also helps you know what a person thinks and why. You can get to know someone as a person who will help you both enjoy them and lead them better.

Accepting input from those who work for you is invaluable. From the obvious potential to gather some good ideas, to the more subtle communication that you value them. You might shy away from asking for input because you are fearful of being committed to use the input. You are not obligated! Use what is good and leave the rest. And when you do receive a good idea, give credit where the credit is due.

The bottom line is that people want to know you believe they are important to you and that their contribution matters.

- Do invest generously in your employees.

Financial generosity is good, but this point is not only about money. You probably don’t have full control of the financial resources, and those resources are limited and finite. But treating your staff with a spirit of generosity is much larger than their paycheck.

You can invest in your staff by being approachable. Some use an “open door” policy, and others with a tighter schedule can still practice consistent availability. Another investment is to give each person the benefit of the doubt. Assume the best until you know otherwise. Don’t waste time searching out the veracity of a rumor. Go and talk directly



with the person in question. More times than not it proves to be a misunderstanding. And when it is not, now you can deal with the facts quickly and decisively.

Remember that your authority is borrowed. One of the great gifts you can invest in those who report to you is by demonstrating grace and humility. Giving grace doesn't mean you are sloppy or weak; it communicates Christ's Spirit in you. And candidly, no one wants to work for a prideful boss.

A humble spirit is always appropriate. Apologize when necessary. When you keep in mind that someone loaned you the authority that you have, it shapes how you use that authority, for their good rather than your gain.

- Don't lower your standards. You have a boss too. You are accountable to someone or a board of some kind. You are responsible for your areas or the overall success of the organization. So while you want to be liked, sometimes you will be unpopular.

John Maxwell teaches in the Five Levels of Leadership that Level Two grants you permission as a leader. This means your team will follow you because they like you. But you don't get to Level Three without results. This means people follow because you get things done.

Producing results will demand the courage to deal with poor employees and to confront good employees. You will quickly lose credibility if you don't solve problems, especially with problem employees. For example, if you have someone who has a bad attitude, or comes in late several times a week, or is not getting their work done, you need to do something. Correction is needed and you may need to terminate them if they don't turn-around in a timely fashion.

As the boss, your integrity as a leader is on the line by how you handle these more delicate situations. It's one thing to deal with an employee that may be fired, but what about confronting one of your best people? That is also part of your responsibility. Even the best need guidance, direction and occasional correction.

Expect results and reward those who produce results!! Don't lower your standards! Keep the bar high!

- Do provide top-notch training for your employees.



This is often what separates the average boss from the good boss and great boss. So few do this and it makes all the difference! It's not as complicated as it looks, but does require intentionality, passion and consistency.

Under the general umbrella of training, lets separate equipping and developing. Equipping is the process of teaching a person how to do the specifics of their job. Equipping enables each person to accomplish the primary functions of their job. An obvious and simple example would be to equip an administrative assistant to know how to use an Excel Spreadsheet. Another example is to equip a pastor so he can effectively recruit volunteers.

There are hundreds of possible examples.

Developing is training that is less about how to do the specifics of a person's job and more about helping that person become a "bigger, better, stronger person." In the local church, development is most often in the area of spiritual leadership. But this development would help them lead better at home and in the community, not just in the church. The bottom line is that if they left your team, the development you invested makes them a much more capable person.

You don't have to do all the equipping and developing yourself. In fact, you probably can't. But you can do a good percentage of it and see to it that the rest happens in a consistent and high quality manner.

- Don't be unpredictable.

Few things are more menacing in the work place than a boss who is unpredictable. I'm referring to things like mood swings, last minute huge workloads, and changing someone's responsibilities seemingly at a whim. A temperamental boss that causes his or her people to walk around on egg shells wondering what mood they are in that day is a huge morale and productivity killer. Your employees need your levelheaded consistency. I'm not saying you are supposed to be boring and never rock the boat. Quite the contrary, you need to shake things up, but with purpose and always according to principle not feeling.

There is no need to feel you must perform for your staff. Everyone knows you are human and have an occasional bad day. Please note the word occasional. That doesn't mean once a week! Hey, if you treat your people well, train them, invest generously, keep the



standards high and expectations clear, they will allow you an occasional “crazy” day!

In order for you to possess the right kind of predictability you must know what you want. You need to know what you want personally, and what you expect from each person professionally, or you will likely struggle with being unpredictable.

- ❑ Do pray for your team.

Since my context is the local church, praying for those who work for you is more than obvious, it is essential. Candidly, I think it’s essential for any boss who is a Christian, though I understand that you may not be able to be as overt about it in a secular organization.

I have a prayer room in our basement and on my desk that is loaded up with books and bibles is a 3x5 card that simply says, “Pray for Staff.” This is my daily reminder of the privilege and responsibility to pray for specific individuals and the staff as a whole.

Prayer on a practical level is part of how you care for the people that work for you. Prayer makes the substantive difference, both in you and in your staff. As a Christian, you walk with God and have the Holy Spirit within you. This is no small thing. But your ability to make specific asks of God on behalf of someone on your team can and often is life changing!

As you reflect on the thoughts in this article, how are you doing as “boss?” Where are you strong and where can you improve?