

Ensuring Your Company has Strong Leaders, Not Bosses

Are leaders born or made? It's an interesting question that produces a plethora of answers. But here's something that isn't up for debate: People are naturally attracted to leaders.

Leaders possess capabilities that can inspire others to become their best, something that business owners eagerly seek in the people they hire and the individuals they currently employ. When you recognize leadership qualities in your workforce, you can't afford to let them get away. As a result, companies are always looking to identify leadership skills within potential hires to ensure they have a strong base of leaders that can drive the organization forward. These skills include the ability to motivate staff and drive innovation, while doing so with a sense of integrity, transparency and diplomacy.

A great way to gain insight on whether someone is more of a boss or a leader is to do your homework during the hiring process. For example, if you're interviewing an applicant for a management opening, asking them a few questions about how they led various projects or initiatives will tell you a lot about their leadership style.

Additionally, calling one or two of the candidate's references can give you an idea of whether the person was highly regarded for their leadership capabilities in their previous position. The length of their relationship can also provide insight.

"When candidates portray admirable leadership qualities in the interview process, appointing them to supervisory roles can help motivate your other staff members to perform well or seek to become leaders in their own right," said Nancy Halverson, general manager for MRINetwork.

For the most part, employees think rather highly of their managers. In fact, a 2016 poll conducted by CareerBuilder, found nearly two-thirds of respondents gave their bosses an "A" or "B." However, in those instances where bosses received an average or failing grade, it frequently led to employee losses. Almost 40 percent of respondents in the poll said they'd left at least one job due to the management style of their bosses.

In short, as noted in a report by the Society for Human Resource Management, dissatisfied workers don't leave their jobs - they leave their bosses.

How do you ensure you have leaders who inspire instead of bosses who discourage? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Leaders avoid micromanaging and consider others their equals

As discussed in *The Muse*, even though managers may be authority figures, they shouldn't see themselves as "better than" the workers who are in their charge. The best managers view their relationship as more of a partnership, rather than a one-way street where the manager directs and workers perform. Additionally, leaders give their staff autonomy, adopting a more "hands-off" approach to management. In the 2016 CareerBuilder survey, respondents who gave their managers a high letter grade were more likely to work for leaders who they didn't consider to be a micromanager.

2. Leaders take a genuine interest in their team members

Employees have lives beyond the office, spending their time with family members, friends, projects at home or activities within their community. Leaders aim to get to know their team on an individual basis, forming a more personal relationship while at the same time learning about qualities that can contribute to the growth of the business, like expertise that isn't currently being utilized, or traits such as patience or perseverance that would lend themselves well on a special project. Knowing someone at an individual fosters trust and encourages people to give it their all.

3. Leaders prioritize relationships and results

Managers in leadership positions are responsible for ensuring work is completed effectively so growth never ceases. Overbearing bosses may still be able to achieve solid results, but it may produce diminishing returns if employees are at their wits' end and ultimately decide to quit in search of greener pastures. Leaders recognize the value of relationships. They prioritize finding solutions to issues that may be troubling workers and ultimately impeding their work output. Leaders also put greater emphasis on results that are achieved through demanding yet, reasonable processes rather than processes that are tedious and unnecessarily taxing.

"Whether it comes naturally or develops over time, leadership is an indispensable asset that can help your business reach its goals," said Halverson. "Fostering strong leadership and leveraging it to drive the organization forward can be the difference between a run-of-the-mill operation and a truly extraordinary one."

