

What The Boss is Like

Posted on



The word "Boss" often has an ominous ring to it. To some, it brings back memories of a great person, who patiently hears you out and gives valuable advice. To others, it generates images of a dragon in human form, threatening to breathe fire at the slightest provocation. Everyone has a boss, or has had one at some time or the

other. We have all had some great ones and some real lousy ones. But do you know what happens when you are saddled with a mediocre boss? More about it later. Read on to discover what these people are like.

The Great Boss (TGB)

One who creates a great place to work in, so that staff go out in search of new challenges each day, even if their job descriptions do not require them to do so. The job itself could be as boring as sorting mail in the post office or as exciting as taking Steffi Graf out to dinner. The great boss's strategy to make his/her work place a great place for others to work in is simple tell the truth, keep promises, respect individuals, promote curiosity, and encourage fun at work.

We all know that miners delve deep into the bowels of the earth to mine for diamonds. Having mined them, they cut and polish them. As if that was not enough, they then protect them zealously. Remember how the Kohinoor diamond is guarded in the Tower of London?

TGB is like a miner who plunges deep into the organization and emerges with star performers. Having found them, he/she builds and refines those performers. Not satisfied with this, he/she goes a step further and takes great care of them.

TGB knows that no organization can have an all- star cast. The cards never get dealt that way. So having identified stars and nourished them, he/she sets about building strategies to get above average results from average performers. TGB welcomes mistakes from his/her staff since he/she knows that mistakes are a natural outcome of experimentation. This guy/girl knows there is no other better way to learn. TGB borrows ideas shamelessly, but always acknowledges the source.

TGB laughs at other's mistakes and also at his/her own.

TGB never vanishes after luncheon speeches to brown nose with other bosses.

TGB pushes authority and responsibility right down to where the job is being done, is one who empowers the team, and then gets out of the way. Yet, TGB holds himself/herself accountable for the final outcome.

TGB rarely uses killer phrases like, "It can't be done, we tried it before, audit won't allow it."

TGB is one who attends training programs with his/her people, not only in Switzerland or Singapore. The other day I was with the head of a multinational advertising agency, discussing some training needs. We were determining the number of participants, and this person included himself. Wow, I said to myself, this guy is for real. The simple truth is that this gentleman sees his people in the same plane as himself. How many training programs have you attended with your staff? And, if you have, was it to assess the trainers and trainees or to learn something?

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TGB has courage, and tons of it. He/she will tell his/her boss the truth, all the time, not just what the boss likes.

TGB will never say things like, but my staff don't want responsibility", because he/she knows that this merely reflects his/her hiring policies

TGB discriminates only on one simple parameter competence.

The Lousy Boss (TLB)

TLB isn't as big a problem as we may think. TLB is a known danger, so one can plan a strategy to handle one's misfortune Such bosses are generally lousy with

everyone (except their own bosses. in whose presence they suddenly ooze charm), make no bones about it, and are heartily hated by all. You know exactly where you stand with TLB, and if you are good, you better start polishing your CV. Compared to the mediocre boss, TLB is like cotton candy.

The Mediocre Boss (TMB)

TMB is the worst kind of boss you can have. With TMB, you are right royally stuck. TMB is a real killer, a one-man or one-woman demolition squad. With TMB around, you are compelled to continue working at the same place. Let loose a few persons like TMB in corporate corridors, and you can kiss good-bye to organizational excellence. Here are some characteristics of TMB:

TMB identifies problems, but rarely has solutions for them.

TMB is secretly terrified that someone may outshine him/her.

TMB will never develop subordinates.

TMB is comfortable only with mediocre subordinates, and normally surrounds himself with such people.

TMB will often say how much he/she appreciates your, but how his hands are tied, so he can't do anything for you.

TMB is brilliant in one aspect manipulating his/her boss.

TMB sits on the fence as long as possible. At meetings. TMB will pick holes in the logic of other people, but will never commit him- self/herself.

TMB has a Ph.D. in blaming the system for all its ills, and how he she is dead against it. Yet, TMB will guard his/her job. zealously. and will do nothing to change the system or change his/her job.

TMB is like a badly designed missile. It can't be fired, nor can it be replaced. (You have to fire a missile before you can figure out that it is useless!)

The best thing going for TMB is that he/she isn't bad enough for management to be motivated to replace him/her. But the real cost of TMB is enormous in terms of lost opportunities, absence of motivation in subordinates, quality of work, and a host of other parameters which cannot be quantified in tangible terms, unless management takes it upon itself to focus on these issues. Yet, how many CEOs devote time to examine these horrendous losses?

How about sending out copies of your organization chart and asking staff to colour each position using a simple colour code: Green for Great, Yellow for Lousy, and Red for Mediocre people occupying those positions? By the way, no one should be exempt from this poll. Take a count after receiving the input, and display your findings in the company newsletter and on bulletin boards. The outcome will serve as a traffic signal on a busy highway, warning you about your corporate health. After all, we all go for medical checkups. Why then should corporations not go for medical checkups? Corporate balance sheets merely indicate physical health. **Isn't it important to check corporate psychological health as well? Isn't it better to discover this internally, before market forces drive you out of the market? Any volunteers?**



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