

The Five E's to Being the Boss You Want Your Boss to Be

Written by Dr. Chris Alexander, PE | Friday, July 7, 2017

The phrase “Be the Boss You Want Your Boss to Be” is like the Golden Rule for bosses, or least it should be. Odds are if you aren't currently in charge of someone, you will be. As a minimum, we're all in charge of ourselves so let's start there.

Bosses play a critically important role and in a very real sense they are the “parents of our careers”. Early in our careers bosses can help us see who we can become and have the capacity to set our careers on a powerful trajectory. Have a great boss and the possibilities are limitless, get stuck with a bad one and you might be looking for a new job.

The key to being a great boss is akin to what it takes to be a great parent. We all know people who have had great parents (perhaps you are one of the fortunate ones), but we also know people whose parents were discouraging, belittling, or abusive. Bosses yield the same power in the workplace. In this article, we'll explore five traits that make great bosses based on the patterns we see in great parents. Ironically, all five traits start with the letter “E”; hence, the “memorable” title of our article...

EXAMPLE: Great bosses set the example for those they lead. Successful groups and businesses are typically led by a leader who excels and models the behavior they want to see in their team. The old phrase “lead by example” will always be a universal truth, especially when it comes to being a boss. Great bosses set the example by being the best they can be and focusing on excellence and attention to detail.

ENGAGE: Leaders might impress from a distance, but they impact up close. Great bosses impact their employees by engaging them on a deep level, and *as often as practical*. This means that as bosses we need to know our staff members, which includes their likes, dislikes, dreams, and sources of discouragement. Every boss should be encouraged to take their direct reports to lunch at least once per month. If this is impractical because you have too many people directly reporting to you (i.e., more than 10-12 staff members), you should consider a re-org and build an organization beneath you by reducing your number of direct reports.

EXPECTATIONS: Great bosses, and parents, set clear expectations. They communicate to those under their charge what is expected of them so there is no ambiguity. Once expectations are clearly defined it is the boss's job to make sure everything gets completed; typically, this involves completing tasks on time and on budget. It has been my observation that businesses fail because leaders do not clearly communicate expectations to their staff and do not hold them accountable for what should be done. As a boss if there is any confusion among your staff in what should be done, make sure you fix it quickly!

EVALUATE: This goes hand-in-hand with “Expectations”; however, this trait is much more practical. Employees need to be evaluated and told areas where they are doing well and where they need to improve. It is important to balance both because, as a boss, your message for areas needing improvement is most likely to be heard if you focus first on areas of success (everyone does at least one thing well!). The best bosses provide feedback that guide the employee to be the very best they can be. On occasion, bosses might have employees who are not going to work out long-term for the organization. Great bosses have a “big picture” view and help all employees achieve greatness, even if it means they must leave the organization.

ENCOURAGE: I've intentionally saved the most important trait for last. Surveys tell us that employees stay or leave companies because of their bosses. As much as we might not want this to be true, it is. When people feel valued and part of something bigger than themselves, they'll do anything for the leader and the organization. As a boss, we need to engage our employees enough to know how they're feeling and help them understand our expectations for them. Great bosses possess the ability to make even periods of discipline and disappointment good experiences. I once had a boss who made me feel great even as he was confronting me with something I had really messed up (and trust me, on this occasion I really messed up!).

I hope the “Five E's to Being the Boss You Want Your Boss to Be” have given you some food for thought and more importantly, given you some practical insights on traits for which to strive as a boss (and parent, if you are one). When I started managing people I realized the tremendous responsibility and weight it carried. Second to my role as husband and father, my role as boss is the second most important job I have. Hopefully, if you manage people, you feel the same way. If you do, your employees will thank you for it and hopefully, the market place will as well!