



# Always Strive to Be a Better Boss

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



NEW TECHNIQUES AND INSPIRATIONS CAN  
HELP ELEVATE PERFORMANCE.

Among my resolutions each year is the goal of being a better boss. It ends up on the list every January, and remains a priority throughout the year. Why? Because no matter how many years I have been managing others or how many unique individuals I have supervised, I am 100 percent sure there is room for improvement. As a dedicated lifelong learner, I'm constantly looking for new techniques and inspirational role models to help elevate my performance.

In any given week, I am exposed to articles, books, presentations, and even TV shows and movies that spark my imagination and give me benchmarks to compare myself against. There are also all too many examples of

bad bosses, and not just in movies like *Horrible Bosses*. In conversations with my colleagues, interactions with our members, case law studies and headline news, I learn about managers who exhibit all sorts of concerning behaviors. There are constant reminders that many bosses simply do not possess the experience, training, skills, or ability to be effective. Many bosses, like me, realize that managing others takes time, patience, and self-awareness. By coaching my own team members who are also bosses, I have ample opportunity to reflect on different approaches and see how diverse management styles can be effective.

Two recent articles, both of which were forwarded to me by one of my direct reports, another boss, take a look at



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this intriguing topic. The first article from *Harvard Business Review*, “Good Bosses Switch Between Two Leadership Styles,” by Jon Maner, describes dominance and prestige as two prominent styles. Dominance means the leader influences others by relying upon their power and formal authority, while prestige means that the leader exhibits knowledge and expertise and encourages others to follow. The author goes on to illustrate situations that are best suited for one style or the other. Ultimately, he concludes that a mature leader is able to diagnose a workplace situation and be able to utilize either style depending on the circumstances and organizational culture.

The other article—“7 Core Beliefs of Great Bosses,” written by Travis Bradberry, a contributor to *Entrepreneur*—talks about the dynamic nature of great leadership. Although all seven core beliefs resonated with me, a few were particularly timely messages in light of my own leadership growth opportunities. Specifically, “Diversity, not like-mindedness, bears fruit.” This core belief is a reminder to avoid the “just like me syndrome” and

encourage constructive conversations around areas of disagreement.

Another core belief that struck a chord is, “Change is an opportunity, not a curse.” Great bosses need to encourage and support change, not block or fear it. Every leader needs to take time to consider how daily behaviors either promote or discourage risk-taking and innovation.

If *you* are also striving to be a better boss, I recommend reading these and other leadership-focused articles and doing an honest assessment of your own performance. Remember, there is always room for improvement and a plethora of places to look for inspiration.

To assess your leadership abilities, look closely at your foodservice department and the people you are leading. Are you able to attract and—most importantly—*retain* good employees? Does your work team seem happy in their roles and willing to go the extra mile when called upon? Many factors impact employee satisfaction—including wages, benefits, scheduling, the work itself, the opportunity to advance, and engagement. That said, having an effective boss at the helm often carries

more influence than any other employment factor. While it’s true that you can’t please all of the people all of the time, if the majority of your work team finds you fair, approachable, honest, supportive, and you experience low turnover, you’re doing something right.

On the other hand, if your department is like a revolving door with staff exiting frequently, if tempers often flare, if disrespect is rampant, if employees are mean-spirited towards coworkers, if work ethic is lacking, or if other negative behaviors are pervasive, it’s time to make some changes. You need to honestly and critically assess the root of these problems. Is it them? Is it you? Or is it a combination of the two?

If you honestly feel your employees are the root cause of the problems, take a closer look and determine which staff members exude the most negativity. You will need to coach them on your expectations and give them a firm timeframe for improvement, or you might have to formulate an “exit strategy” for terminating those who have a toxic attitude or poor work ethic. (If you’re unfamiliar with employment laws, be

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Visit the Management Association website at [hrsourc.org](http://hrsourc.org) for news and references on a wide array of human resources topics.

sure to consult your HR department for guidance.) When you fix the problems—either through coaching or through employee termination—your good and valued staff members will respect that you're not tolerating poor performance or active disengagement any longer. Your team's admiration for you will increase when you do the tough stuff and create a harmonious and effective workplace.

If you come to the uncomfortable conclusion that it's your behaviors that are negatively impacting your department and employees, it's time to swallow that bitter pill and begin making changes... immediately. Assess where your shortcomings lie, and then take steps to improve and correct them. Ask yourself some hard questions. Is your negativity or stress impacting your staff? Are you quick to criticize but slow to praise? Do you seek the opinions and ideas of your employees, and then ignore their concerns or recommendations? If so, take swift action. Enroll in management or leadership courses, or attend programs which focus on effective supervisory skills. Other ways to improve your performance as a boss



might include attending webinars, or reading books and articles targeted at your weaknesses. You can also seek feedback from trusted staff members or go to your HR department for resources. If your issues seem paralyzing or insurmountable, consider seeking help from a consultant, an employment coach, or even a mental health professional.

If, after honest assessment, you conclude that the blame for workplace problems lies with both you and your staff, it may be time for a heart to heart with your team. Let them express

their workplace and leadership frustrations to you without fear of reprisal or retaliation. Then reiterate your mission statement and communicate your expectations and desire for an effective, productive work environment and employment culture where everyone is valued for their unique personalities and abilities. Respect is key!

One last thought. An employee's perspective on what constitutes a great boss may vary from one individual

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to another. Some staff members value the ability and freedom to make decisions on the job. Others prefer that their boss is very specific with instructions and clearly spells out the sequence of required tasks. Some employees enjoy frequent team meetings as a way to break up their day, connect with their boss and coworkers, and engage in

something other than the daily “grind.” Others view meetings as interruptions and a waste of time, and favor staying on track in terms of their daily responsibilities.

Although employee views differ somewhat on what they want in a boss, certain traits and characteristics of a good boss are pretty much universal. Employees want bosses who are

honest, fair, personable, caring, transparent, have confidence in their team, value uniqueness, communicate clearly, go to bat for their staff, and respect diversity.

Do you exhibit those characteristics? It’s definitely something to ponder and to work towards. I hope we all make positive strides on our journey to be a better boss. **E**

## REFERENCES

- Good Bosses Switch Between Two Leadership Styles, by Jon Maner, *Harvard Business Review*, December 5, 2016.
- 7 Core Beliefs of Great Bosses, by Travis Bradberry, *Entrepreneur*, January 31, 2017.

## CE Questions



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Reading *Always Strive to Be a Better Boss* and successfully completing these questions online has been approved for 1 hour of continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. CE credit is available ONLINE ONLY. To earn 1 CE hour, purchase the online CE quiz in the ANFP Marketplace. Visit [www.ANFPonline.org/market](http://www.ANFPonline.org/market), select “**Publication**,” then select “**CE article**” at left, then search the title “*Always Strive to Be a Better Boss*” and purchase the article.

1. If you are an effective boss, you should:
  - A. Rest on your laurels
  - B. Request a raise
  - C. Strive to further enhance your performance
2. Good bosses realize that managing others requires:
  - A. Hard-nosed decision-making and inflexibility
  - B. Time, patience, and self-awareness
  - C. Ridiculing poor performance
3. Indicators that you are an effective leader could include:
  - A. Your team is happy and staff turnover is low
  - B. Your department runs successfully and employees respect each other
  - C. All of the above
4. Many factors impact employee satisfaction, but often the biggest influencer is:
  - A. A fair and effective boss
  - B. Dental and vision benefits
  - C. Coworkers who connect outside of work
5. If your employees exude negativity and/or poor work ethic, it’s time to:
  - A. Reiterate expectations and provide a firm timeline for improvement or termination
  - B. Offer bonuses in hopes that staff will respond positively
  - C. Beg for a change in attitude and performance
6. If you determine that your management and leadership skills are lacking:
  - A. Cut your losses and resign
  - B. Wait to get reprimanded before making any changes
  - C. Attend programs and read books and articles focusing on your weaknesses
7. Great bosses all share certain characteristics. They are:
  - A. Honest, fair, personable, caring
  - B. Have confidence in their team, value uniqueness, communicate clearly
  - C. All of the above