What Kind of Boss Are You?

The best bosses strike a balance between hard-boiled and easy-going.

Happy Harry Wadsworth liked to be popular. He thought he was a good boss because everybody in his department liked him. He did not want to upset this popularity so he hesitated to enforce minor infractions of rules or correct minor errors in work. When a reprimand was called for, he would stall it for so long that the reason for it was often forgotten. However, praise was so common that it lost significance.

Terry Tompkins was tough. She believed that one had to crack the whip to get the work done. She was abrupt, dogmatic and her favorite expression was “I am the boss. You get paid to work so you’d better work or else.” She rarely praised her people and often bawled them out in front of the whole department. Her people referred to her as “Terrible Terry.”

Both Happy Happy and Terrible Terry had serious problems because neither of these extremes can really work. Let’s look at what happened in each of these areas.

The Easy-Going Boss

When a supervisor does not control the department, the work will be affected. Production schedules will not be met, quality suffers, people take advantage of this leniency and absenteeism, tardiness and general attitudes deteriorate.

Harry’s people feel leaderless and walk all over him.

Why will a supervisor become so lenient and easygoing to the point where the department suffers? Often it can be traced to a feeling of insecurity in one’s own ability. Insecure persons demand approval from others to bolster one’s own ego. Such people want to be popular, to be “one of the gang.” They believe that leniency with subordinates will engender employee approval.

The most effective style is somewhere between extremes.

When Harry’s boss discovers that the department is falling behind, Harry will be held accountable. Now, Han-y gets nervous and knows he has to reverse this rapidly. A natural reaction is to do an abrupt about-face. He begins to get tough and demanding. He jumps on his people, often hollering and screaming. He begins to reprimand people for every minor violation and punishes people for matters he had ignored only a week earlier. This causes resentment and uncertainty among his people. The work may pick up for a while, but as the nature of Happy Harry’s personality is quite the opposite of these actions, once things straighten out, he reverts to his old self.

Frequent changes in management style are more demoralizing than sticking to one style-good or bad. Your people cannot anticipate how you will behave. This uncertainty leads to poor morale and heavy turnover.

The cause of Harry’s easygoing attitude stems from his own sense of insecurity. He has to build up his self-confidence.

One way of accomplishing this is to become expert in the work one does. When a person is thoroughly knowledgeable about the work, there is a feeling of security in it that leads to self-confidence in all matters pertaining to the work. He also should study more about human relations and apply what he has learned to his job.

The Hard-Roiled Supervisor

Terrible Terry has a similar problem. Although her style is quite different from Harry’s, the results are much the same. She causes resentment among her people and consciously or subconsciously, they refuse to cooperate. Lower production, higher turnover, more absenteeism, numerous grievances and generally poor morale are the usual evidences of such a lack of cooperation.
The cause of the tough approach as of the lenient one is insecurity. However, the “desire to please” attitude is replaced by a gruff manner and authoritarian veneer. It is more difficult for hard-boiled leaders to change, probably because they have a stubborn feeling that their way is the only way. Stubbornness is an integral part of their behavior pattern.

Again the solution requires a good knowledge of human relations. The supervisor must learn to praise more frequently and how to administer effective reprimands without causing resentment and rancor. Terrible Terry must learn to tone down her manner and speech to avoid arguments and to work more amiably with her coworkers and staff.

The Best Supervisor

The most effective supervisory style is somewhere between these two extremes. It is grounded on understanding human behavior and applying this knowledge to working with the people under his or her jurisdiction.

He or she praises people for good work, but does not throw praise around lightly. Harry overdid praise to the point that none of his people felt that their specially good work was really appreciated. Terry never praised her people so they felt that there was no point in doing especially good work.

Reprimanding, where called for, should be done in private and in a calm manner. Never raise one’s voice and always give the employee the opportunity to tell his or her own side of the story. Listen attentively and do not interrupt. Give constructive criticism and be as specific as possible.

Do not reprimand when you are in temper or in anger. Do not get maneuvered into an argument. Avoid sarcasm and nagging. Keep to the issues. Remember the purpose of a reprimand is to right a wrong. A good supervisor does not want to compound the wrong by creating resentment. Always emphasize the what rather than the who.

Good leaders are neither wishy-washy hail-fellow-well-met characters nor tyrants. They are neither ignored nor feared by their subordinates. Capable supervisors have inner confidence plus the respect of their people.

About the Author...

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| A simple comparison |
|---------------------|----------------|
| **The ineffective leader** | **The effective leader** |
| Drives people | Guides people |
| Instills fear | Inspires enthusiasm |
| Says “Do” | Says “Let’s do.” |
| Makes work drudgery | Makes work interesting |
| Relies upon authority | Relies upon cooperation |
| Says “I,” “I,” “I.” | Says “We.” |

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