

ARE YOU A GOOD BOSS? DOES IT MATTER?

BY KENNETH A. "BUZZ" SHAW

GOOD VS. BAD



Well. Are you a good boss? Does it matter? And what does being a good or bad boss have to do with leadership anyway? I will address each of these questions, but first a reminder of what constitutes leadership.

Leadership, according to author John Gardner, is a process of persuasion and example by which others are motivated to take action. In the working world, your goal is to see that the action taken leads to positive results for your organization or business. That is what leaders do.

So what is a good boss? A good boss, says author Daniel Goleman, is best described as: a great listener, an encourager, a communicator, courageous, having a sense of humor, empathetic, decisive, willing to take responsibility, humble and willing to share authority. How many of these attributes describe you?

Compare the good boss with Goleman's bad boss. He profiles something as follows: a blank wall, a doubter, secretive, intimidating, bad-tempered, self-centered,


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indecisive, a blamer, arrogant and mistrusting of others. How many of these characteristics fit you?


No doubt, on a given day we reveal both good and bad boss characteristics, but we should continually strive to be on the good boss side of the ledger and have concern when we don't measure up. This leads to the answer to the second question.

Does it really matter? Yes! Goleman and others (including yours truly) believe that good bosses help employees feel calm, appreciated and inspired to do their best. This allows them to focus on the work at hand, achieving goals, and seeing obstacles as challenges, not threats. This security can be contrasted with the environment created by the bad boss. Here the employees tend to be anxious, preoccupied with failing and more focused on playing it safe than doing the job right.

And what does this have to do with leadership? Quite a lot. But not all good bosses are good leaders because good leaders must also be fanatically focused on goal setting, communicating expectations in specific terms, providing feedback on performance and, always, challenging colleagues to do better. Only then can we proclaim the good boss an effective leader. Yes, being a good boss is an important part of being a good leader, but not an end in itself.

So, are you a good boss? Only you and your colleagues know. And, yes, a good boss does help create an environment where he or she can also lead. Putting it all together is what makes great leaders. 

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Have a question about leadership for expert Kenneth Shaw? Send an e-mail to jcreighton@syracuse.com and he will respond in an upcoming issue. 

Kenneth A. "Buzz" Shaw also makes his expertise available to the public through his Web site, <http://whitman.syr.edu/shaw/>, which includes videos, articles, podcasts, speeches and presentations for leaders and business professionals. 