

Spotting those flaws that make the team leader into a bad boss

Ask any group of managers if they think they are good to work for and no doubt you will be given a resounding “yes!” I am yet to come across a manager who either acknowledges or admits that s(he) might be a bad people manager. But yet, if you ask any group of workers if they’ve experienced a bad boss, you will be sure to get another resounding “yes!” So let us look at what is it that makes a bad boss and see what a manager can do to ensure that s(he) doesn’t end up tagged as one, a label which is almost impossible to lose.

There is the obvious bad boss, who still believes in managing people through bullying, offensive and dictatorial behaviour which is guaranteed to instil fear and loathing in equal measure. It is hard to believe that such Neanderthals exist in our time, but be assured, they are still out there. Then, there is the other type of boss who thinks they are smarter than everyone else and adopts a more insidious style of people management, pretending that they have their workers best interests at heart. Newsflash for this group, people aren’t stupid and can spot his type of insincerity from twenty paces.. at least!

Pity however, the third category of bad boss, who although they may be well-intentioned, fail as managers not because of what they do, but because of what they don’t do. Zenger & Folkman refer to this phenomenon as “sins of omission, not commission”. Their research study of 30,000 US managers identified the 10 fatal flaws that contribute to defining a bad boss and a failed leader. These flaws translate well on this side of the Atlantic and they are listed here in order of most to least fatal:

1. They fail to inspire others owing to lack of energy and enthusiasm
2. They accept mediocre performance over quality results
3. They lack clear vision and direction
4. They are unable to collaborate
5. They fail to walk the talk
6. They fail to learn from their mistakes
7. They fail to innovate and lead change
8. They fail to develop others
9. They lack effective interpersonal skills
10. They display bad judgement and make poor decisions

Zenger & Folkman point out that while any one of these flaws can be fatal enough, the research shows that it is usually an aggregate of a number of them that can contribute to one's failure as a boss.

Even the most well-intentioned bosses can possess any of these flaws and their ineffectiveness as a leader may be down to their lack of self-awareness, self-confidence or competence. But that's not good enough in today's world where, despite recession and high levels of unemployment, modern employees simply won't tolerate such behaviour from their leaders. It is a well-known adage that people don't leave organisations, they leave managers and having a poor boss is recognised as the number one reason people cite for leaving their jobs. So it doesn't matter how well they are paid or how good the benefits are, people will eventually vote with their feet if they find themselves working for a bad boss.

It is also a well-accepted fact that organisations are only as good as the people they keep, so thriving organisations depend on both the quality of their bosses and of their employees. In previous articles I wrote of the importance of the manager in the employee engagement and retention equation. So, organisations need to support their good bosses and manage or indeed manage out the bad ones. After all in the world of work as in the world of nature it is a case of survival of the fittest and only the best will do.