

Advice for the modern boss

1 Warmer

- a. Which of these qualities are most important for a good boss? Put them in order from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important).

A good boss is ...

- a good listener. _____
- a decisive person. _____
- always willing to change their mind. _____
- always friendly. _____
- a hard-working person. _____

2 Key words

- a. Read the definitions and then fill the gaps in the example sentences or questions. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. people who are in the same professional group as another person (1)

How do you get on with your _____?

2. people who are less important or who have lower status in an organisation than other people (1)

He treats his _____ very badly.

3. someone who pretends to be someone else in order to trick people (2)

I don't believe he's a real manager. I think he's a/an _____!

4. someone who is active and achieves things (5)

Damien isn't a boss who enjoys relaxing. He regards himself very much as a/an _____.

5. the ability to work hard or to make a lot of effort over a long period of time without getting tired (5)

You need an extraordinary amount of strength and _____ to run a marathon in under three hours.

6. time when you can relax and not work (10)

What do you enjoy doing in your _____?

7. someone who wants to control every part of a business in a way that is not necessary or useful (11)

He's the worst kind of _____ you can imagine. You can't do anything in this office without his approval.

8. something that is popular or fashionable for only a short time (12)

Can you think of things that became a/an _____ but are no longer popular?

9. to want something very much and in a way that is hard to control (14)

Many employees _____ recognition for the hard work that they do.

10. lacking the skills or ability to do something (15)

Can you think of an example of a/an _____ person who got an important job?

11. a formal promise, especially one taken in a court of law (16)

Even today, all new American citizens have to take a/an _____ of allegiance.

12. to make something quickly because you do not have much time (18)

It sometimes feels as if economic policy has been _____ in a couple of hours.

Take long lunches, go home at four: tips for the modern boss

BY SIMON KUPER

- 1 I'm at an age when some of my peers are becoming bosses of their organisations. I've recently chatted to three who admit to feeling confused. When they were underlings, they knew what their tasks were. But now they wonder: what is a boss meant to do all day?
- 2 Being Generation X-ers, they suffer from imposter syndrome, are somewhat in awe of their staff and don't want to run around shouting at them. One of my friends has concluded: "There isn't much concretely that I can do in our business without causing accidents."
- 3 He now takes long lunches and sometimes goes home at 4pm. His management motto, which he keeps secret, is: "Don't just do something – stand there!"
- 4 You won't find this motto in airport business books. However, I suspect that many heads of companies, government departments and NGOs should adopt it too.
- 5 The traditional boss is a doer. He (94 per cent of chief executives of FTSE 100 companies are men) has typically spent his career getting up early and hitting key performance indicators (KPIs). He was selected partly for his stamina.
- 6 The late chief executive of a giant multinational company was distinguished (one of his friends tells me) by his ability to get drunk until 2am, then rise at 6am and – after fortifying himself with a swift tot – deliver a fluent presentation at 7am.
- 7 The doer-boss rarely lacks ego, especially after getting the top job. At 7am on day one, he charges into the office, eager to get stuck in.
- 8 The only problem is: what to do? Elsbeth Johnson, author of the new book *Step Up, Step Back: How to Really Deliver Strategic Change in Your Organization*, says the boss's job is making strategy: "What is the purpose of our organisation? What does good look like? How do we behave – with each other, with our customers – in order to deliver these outcomes?"
- 9 She says an organisation needs a limited number of priorities and projects. The boss should set these early on, then spend years ensuring they get carried out. "You have to be prepared to be bored," Johnson tells the bosses she mentors. "You'll be talking about the same strategies, not making new decisions."
- 10 But nothing in the typical boss's ascent has been a preparation for strategic thinking. Few organisations set thinking KPIs. Many bosses regard strategising as something to do in their downtime, after the real work of producing stuff is done. In the phrase of one banker: "Strategy is for after five."
- 11 And so the boss starts "helping" his expert underlings with their daily work, even though he's probably years out of date, especially on the tech. He ends up wasting his salary doing grunt work and stunting everyone else's career growth. The model for the leader as micromanager is Jimmy Carter, who in his first months as US president personally reviewed staffers' requests to use the White House tennis courts.
- 12 When doers take on strategy, their manic energy ("change is the only constant!") can be disastrous. Johnson says that, especially after the Christmas holidays, bosses risk coming back with "random new ideas they have come across, or the latest management fad in their sector, whether it's 'agile' or 'digital'."
- 13 She explains: "They read something in *Harvard Business Review*, they're in the airport and pick up a business book, and the shiny new idea gets put into the system when it's the last thing the system needs."
- 14 Many bosses also imagine they have to motivate staff. In fact, the risk of demotivating them is much higher. Millennials, who consistently say in surveys that they crave empowerment at work, don't want a 55-year-old shouting slogans at them and sticking up laminated posters about their organisation's amazing "culture".
- 15 The underlying problem is that the boss typically thinks he's Steve Jobs, when statistically he is much more likely to be the maddening incompetent David Brent from the TV series *The Office*.

Continued on next page

16 A new boss should therefore take the traditional physician's oath: first, do no harm. My "Don't just do something" friend emails: "I've made sure there is a strategy (mostly written by my colleagues), I solve problems between colleagues, I represent the organisation towards our board and sometimes externally, and I keep things happy in the office (we're getting ping-pong tables!). That's about it."

17 When I ran his leadership philosophy by Johnson, she partially approved, though she thinks he should be doing more strategy. It's true that my friend

may not go down in history as a transformative leader. On the other hand, he's unlikely to be a catastrophe either.

18 Think of the world's most prominent boss job, the US presidency. George W Bush spent the first months of his administration taking repeated holidays at his Texas ranch. He was often criticised for that – until, after the attacks of September 11 2001, he rushed back to the office and threw together a strategy to remake the Middle East. Now, people criticise Donald Trump for playing too much golf. I wish he'd play more.

FT

Simon Kuper, 5 March 2020
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3 Understanding the article

a. Choose the best answers according to the text.

- Why were the three managers the author spoke to confused?
 - Because they caused a lot of accidents in their companies.
 - Because they weren't sure what they are supposed to do all day.
 - Because they sometimes went home at 4pm.
- What is the typical traditional boss?
 - An early riser who enjoys meeting performance targets.
 - Someone who gets up at 6am and delivers a fluent presentation at 7am.
 - A hard worker but also someone who lacks ego.
- According to Elsbeth Johnson, what should the boss' job be?
 - Making new decisions all the time.
 - Having a clear strategy and ensuring it is carried out.
 - Producing stuff until five and then enjoying downtime.

4. What sometimes happens to bosses after the Christmas holidays?
 - a. They start wasting their salary by doing boring work.
 - b. They begin reviewing every request the employees make, no matter how minor.
 - c. They bring in a random new idea they've read in a business book or magazine.
5. What happens when bosses feel they have to constantly motivate their staff?
 - a. They actually demotivate them.
 - b. They start using slogans and putting up posters.
 - c. They introduce new systems that no-one understands.
6. What is the basic message of the traditional physician's oath?
 - a. Start by not doing any damage.
 - b. Don't just do something.
 - c. Make sure there is a strategy.

4 Business language – idioms

a. Match the expressions from the text to their definitions.

1. to get stuck in
 2. to go down in history
 3. to be in awe of someone
 4. grunt work
 5. to stunt someone's growth
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- a. jobs that lack glamour and prestige and are often boring and repetitive
 - b. to prevent someone from developing fully
 - c. to start doing some work with energy and enthusiasm
 - d. to have a feeling of great respect and admiration, often combined with fear
 - e. to be remembered by many people for having done something

b. Now, answer these questions.

1. In what kind of situations do people need to get stuck in?
2. What decisions have gone down in history for being bad decisions?
3. Who are you in awe of and why?
4. What are some examples of grunt work in a business context?
5. In a work situation, what kind of things can stunt someone's growth?

5 Business language – collocations

a. Fill the gaps in the questions using these words from the text. Then answer the questions.

come across deliver do motivate set

1. In your opinion, what things _____ staff the most?
2. What new ideas have you _____ recently?
3. How would you feel if you had to _____ a presentation to a large audience?
4. What kind of things can _____ harm in an office environment?
5. What priorities have you _____ for yourself over the next year?

6 Discussion

a. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Give reasons for your choices.

1. "The best bosses are the ones that no-one notices"
2. "If employees are not involved in the decision-making processes in their company they will not feel motivated"
3. "A boss' sole responsibility should be to set a strategy for the company"

7 Wider business theme – role play

- a. **Choose one of the roles below and make a pair of boss and employee or a group with one boss and several employees and role play the situation.**
- A.** You are the boss of a large company with 500 employees. The company produces components for computers. In order to save money, you have decided to relocate the company from the capital city (where business rents are extremely high) to a pleasant but rather remote area of the country. The region you are planning to move to has good leisure facilities (mountains, lakes, etc.) but no airport or motorways and only a slow rail service. It takes more than four hours to reach the capital. Prepare a proposal for the staff and defend your plans at the general meeting.
- B.** You have been working for the company for 15 years. You love living in the capital city and have lived there all your life. You strongly dislike physical activities such as hiking and skiing. You might be prepared to relocate to another area of the country for work but only if you can continue to live in the capital and are given a free flat in the new location for use during the working week. You would also require a large pay increase.