

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)

She's a very friendly person who always gets on well with her _____.

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

He treats his _____ very badly.

3. a short statement that expresses something such as a principle or an aim, often used as a statement of belief by an organisation or individual (4)

What's your _____? Mine is 'Never give up!'

4. expressing yourself in a clear and confident way, without seeming to make an effort (6)

What do you need to include if you want to make a _____ speech or presentation?

5. a plan or method for achieving something, especially over a long period of time (8)

Bosses need to develop a clear _____ to improve the performance of their companies.

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

What do you enjoy doing in your _____?

7. jobs that lack glamour and prestige and are often boring and repetitive (11)

What examples of _____ can you think of in your job?

8. causing a lot of damage or harm (12)

Can you think of any _____ decisions companies have made in the last few years?

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

Taking selfies in designer shops quickly became a _____.

10. the process of giving people more control over their life or more power to do something (14)

What examples of _____ at work can you think of?

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

It's surprising that such an _____ person managed to get such an important job.

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*.

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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. Read the statements and decide whether they are true or false.
- b. Rewrite any that are false to make them true according to the information given in the article.
1. Less than half the chief executives of the UK's leading companies (the FTSE 100) are men.
 2. Traditional bosses, who are described in the article as 'doers', often lack ego.
 3. According to Elsbeth Johnson, a boss's main job is to develop a strategy for the company.
 4. She believes that bosses should make new decisions all the time so that they don't get bored.
 5. Bosses often return from their Christmas holidays with lots of random new ideas.
 6. When bosses try to motivate staff, their actions often have the opposite effect.

4 Business language – phrasal verbs

- a. Complete the questions by adding these prepositions or adverbial particles. Then answer the questions.

across

by

down

out

up

1. Which of your everyday tasks or duties do you find the most difficult to carry _____?
2. What is the most interesting new idea you have come _____ recently?

Intermediate

3. If you have a new idea, who do you run it _____ first?
4. Which of the today's business people will go _____ in history as people who changed the world?
5. What is the most interesting book you have picked _____ while travelling?

5 Business language – two-word expressions

a. Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text. Then use the two-word phrases to complete sentences a-e.

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1. underlying | a. executive |
| 2. strategic | b. growth |
| 3. chief | c. problem |
| 4. career | d. leader |
| 5. transformative | e. thinking |

- a. A/an _____ is the most senior person working in a company or organisation who is responsible for running it.
- b. A/an _____ is one who changes things in an organisation and makes them better.
- c. A/an _____ is one that is not obvious or directly stated.
- d. _____ is the process of planning the activities of a business in a competent and productive way.
- e. _____ is the ability to learn new skills and use them at work.

6 Discussion

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

1. "A good boss is one you don't notice"
2. "Employees will feel motivated if they feel that their boss is listening to them"

7 Wider business theme – presentation

You have to deliver a presentation at an international management conference. The title of your presentation is 'Ten Things that Make a Good Manager'. Make a list of the qualities that you think a good manager should have, adding to the ones you used in Exercise 1. You could also use the internet to get further ideas and add to your list or amend it (enter 'qualities of a good manager' into a search engine). Decide which of the qualities is the most important and highlight it at the end of your presentation ('Above all, the most important quality is ...'). Then deliver your presentation to the class.