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FIRM MANAGEMENT

Are You a Bad Boss? 10 Signs That You Might Be

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Dave McClure • Jul. 29, 2015



The managers who are vital to the success of a business aren't just bad. The majority are shockingly bad, and you might be one of them.

A Gallup survey from last year found that only one in 10 bosses in America has any native talent for management, and only another two in ten could be good managers with a little training and support. That leaves the overwhelming majority of bosses having little or no management talent at all.

Follow-up surveys, including the Gallup 2015 survey of workers in America, found that people don't leave jobs – they leave their bosses. About half of the 7,200 adults surveyed said they have left a job in order “to get away from their manager.” Worse yet, it found that only about 30 percent are truly engaged in and committed to their jobs. These rest are ambivalent at best or disengaged at worst.

Good managers are those who communicate with their employees, motivate people, overcome obstacles and make unbiased decisions for themselves and their team. The fact that so few good managers exist can be chalked up to three realities:

- **The traits that make a great entrepreneur can also make a bad boss.** Entrepreneurs tend, according to a Forbes [article](#), to be obstinate multitaskers who are generally not team players. They can be autocratic, perfectionist, temperamental and workaholic. Though successful, they may have traits that would score as mental illness on standard psych evaluations. Not all are this way, or to any great degree. But the traits are there.
- **Companies fail to choose the candidate with the right talent for the job 82% of the time.** While many companies have talented managers right under their noses, Gallup found that few have the skills to identify and promote them. The secret to getting a management position is more often based on a person's ability to fit into the culture than any management abilities. That is, bad bosses hire or promote other bad bosses.
- **Good managers don't stay in bad companies.** Good managers leave bad work environments, but bad ones stay. Good managers want to work with the most talented employees, and where their own talents will be recognized.

The problem with bad bosses in companies of any size is a loss of productivity, which in turn leads to a loss of profitability. There is also the issue of losing the best and most talented workers – those professionals best positioned to innovate and create.

Any company can be successful in the short term, driven by its founders and an innovative idea. Success in the long, term, however, requires a completely different

skill set that guiding a startup through its first critical years. That is why so many founders are eventually relegated to a corner office so they do not interfere with continued growth.

If you do happen to be a bad boss, what are the traits that are sabotaging the company you exist within? Here are 10 of the most common “bad bosses:”

- **The Micro-Manager.** This is a boss who has to make every decision personally. Or, worse yet, reviews all decisions made by workers and reverse them or over-rule them long after the fact. Micro-managers may seem to be concerned and involved, but they are in fact terrified they will be blamed if a member of the team makes a mistake – and therefore has to be in total charge of every facet of every task.
- **The Know-It-All.** Bosses may know a lot about the core business of the firm. This is especially true in small CPA firms, where the managers may have awesome accounting, tax and audit skills. That does not, however, mean that they are well-organized, have great client management skills, or know how to manage such intricate specializations as human resources, marketing, new product assessment or client retention. Almost no partner or boss is truly a master of all facets of the business. They may just think they are.
- **The “Can-Do” Boss.** This is the boss or partner who commits you and the firm to meet a new and tight deadline on a shoestring budget – in addition to all of the other work already being done. This can stress the entire firm to the limit. An occasional “impossible” done well, in which workers share in the glory and reward, is fine. But if this is a regular event, good workers will flee from the aggravation and lack of recognition.
- **The Paper-Pusher.** A boss who has not management skills and knows it may instead demand that workers protect him or her by filing reports on every single facet of every task. In this way, if anything at all goes wrong the boss can show in excruciating detail that it was not their fault. This style of manager will have workers spending so much time writing and filing paper that they have little time to do anything productive. One major clue: the boss who requires that every action, decision and project be authorized in advance and in writing before work can be started.
- **The Watcher.** Technology is a wonderful thing, unless it is abused by the micro-managing bad boss. These are the bosses who install time clocks to log workers in and out, who installs cameras in every office so that employees can be monitored

every moment of the day, or those who use time sheets as a management tool rather than a billing tool.

- **The Best Friend.** Part of the morale-building in small firms revolves around group events – lunches, pizza parties, birthday celebrations and so on. But some bosses aren't interested in morale-building – they just want friends and can't find them on her or his own. They become confidants and bar buddies, after-work dinner friends, and sharers of intimate personal insights. It's like working for your life partner, but infinitely more dangerous to your career.
- **The Office Gossip.** Some bosses just love to gossip – especially about people who work for them. They choose favorites to be the recipients of this information, and confide in private to some employees about others. They pit one employee against another for their personal amusement, using gossip in the place of formal performance reviews and honest feedback. Bad bosses use gossip to maintain their own power, destroying anyone with the potential to displace them.
- **The Workaholic.** The workaholic is on the job 24/7, and likes it that way. They have little need for or understanding of life/work balance. Worse yet, he or she insists that everyone who works for them also be a workaholic. They call staff meetings on Sunday mornings. They insist that workers be available at all hours after work in case they or a client needs something. They have the whole company work late on Christmas Eve, just in case a client might possibly still be working and need something. If the boss wants to be a workaholic, fine. You don't need to be one as well.
- **The Liar.** Want to take a better position? The Liar will counter-offer to keep you, but fire you a few months later for disloyalty. The Liar will promise promotions and raises for your excellent work, but will never deliver. Remember, every dollar into your pocket is a dollar less in his or hers. The first time a boss fails to deliver on a promise without a good explanation should be the last day you work for that firm.
- **The Screamer.** There are people who simply derive pleasure in abusing other people, and many of them are in management positions. These are the ones who scream at their staff, belittle them, refuse to listen to their ideas, and who throw temper tantrums when this goes wrong. No part of verbal or emotional abuse should be tolerated by a bad boss, but unfortunately many professionals believe that if they take the abuse they will eventually be rewarded. They won't.

There are other types of bad bosses — the office Romeo, the alcoholic or drug-affected boss, the emotional cripple, the Scrooge, and even boss who lets his or her spouse run the company in the background. The problem with bad bosses is that they seldom recognize themselves.

Particularly in small firms, the bosses themselves may not undergo any performance evaluation each year. A good boss will seek out feedback on how well they are doing and how they may improve as managers – through suggestion boxes or anonymous feedback forms.

Bad bosses do not. But there is nothing to stop staff members from making a copy of this article, highlighting the appropriate points, and leaving it on their desk...

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