

Make Them GLAD You're Their Boss

By

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Criticism has the power to do good when there is something that must be destroyed, dissolved or reduced, but it is capable only of harm when there is something to be built.
Carl Jung

People won't leave if they're glad you're their boss. They will want to stay with a boss that does what it takes to create a culture that capitalizes on each individual's strength. However, bosses often don't know what they should do to contribute to organizational culture, or even to their small part of the culture. For so long people have tried to diagnose diseases, flaws, and weaknesses, but most bosses have had precious little experience studying health. However, knowing more about healthy people enables us to understand resilience and hardiness, the cornerstones required for building something—something like a solid relationship with direct reports. Learning ways to more effectively interact with those that work for you and challenging yourself to discover their strengths are enormous steps toward realizing the goal of being a boss that no one wants to leave.

Develop a GLAD Culture

Without seeing the inherent flaws in their thinking, many bosses worry overmuch about what they *say* to their direct reports. Certainly sending effective messages is important, but developing relationships with others that are characterized by the GLAD Communication Method is more critical for creating positive working relationships with direct reports.

GLAD is an acronym for the four-step process that enables bosses and direct reports to have routine conversations, difficult discussions, and feedback sessions. Bosses who learn and practice this method learn that their modeling this behavior eventually causes others to adopt it too.

- Get to the core of the performance issues.

- Listen to the other first.
- Add your own ideas.
- Develop an action plan.

Get to the Core of the Issue

Getting to the core of the performance issue means focusing the discussion on *actions or behaviors*, things the person can control and change. If personality issues or decision making capacities are interfering with the person's performance, the problem may be an inability, rather than an unwillingness, to do the job. In that case, the boss needs to consider alternatives either to give the direct report additional help or move to him or her to an area that is better suited for that person's talents and strengths.

When giving feedback, focus on *one* concern that can be expressed in *one* sentence. If it won't fit into one sentence, it is more than one discussion. If you try to lump too many things together, the direct report will leave confused and frustrated. Start the discussion with "The problem is..." Be sure to express the problem in *concrete, observable, descriptive* terms, then listen to what they have to say about it.

Listen to The Other First

If you're like most bosses, when someone comes to you with a problem, you try to be a responsive boss and jump in to fix things for your direct report. Solving problems is what you're all about, so it comes easily and naturally. Plus, it just feels like the right thing to do, and it saves times. However well intended you might be, you are inadvertently passing up a chance to develop rapport and abilities in the direct report.

Listening first has many advantages. First, you will *show* your concern and responsiveness by patiently allowing the other to explain the issue. Second, you will operate from a basis of factual knowledge, not guesswork or probability. Third, you will have more of a chance to understand the whole picture, not just a segment of it.

Listening is the skill that otherwise effective leaders most often need to develop. However, taking the time to listen patiently to others does not always have immediate payoffs. Therefore, in an attempt to move project ahead more efficiently, bosses overlook opportunities to hear what their direct reports have to say.

Listening is not the absence of talking; it is the presence of attention. It is not simply hearing; it is comprehension. The art of listening is one of total involvement. It requires participation, action, and effort. It is the glue that holds conversations together and the foundation of understanding. Effective listening skills can be learned; however, like all communication skills, listening requires practice and technique. Active listening techniques can be broken into the following steps:

- Listen to the other before giving your own ideas. Listen to understand, not judge.
- Don't interrupt. When people are on a roll, just listen without saying a word.
- Next, summarize what you have heard. Paraphrase the content of what the other has said, and reflect your understanding of the emotion that was conveyed.
- Ask at least two open, clarifying "How?" "What?" questions to deepen your understanding and to give you all the pertinent information

Add Your Own Ideas

Listening to the other first doesn't mean the boss should not give direction. On the contrary, the third step, to add your own ideas, is the time to do just that. Ideally the discussion to this point should have implied a course of action for the direct report. If, in spite of the boss's best efforts, that hasn't happened, the third step is the time to give that direction.

Once again, clearly defining the specific behaviors that the direct report should address will help to keep the discussion focused. If the boss disagrees with the employee's assessment of the situation, if there has been a shift in priorities, or if the two disagree on action steps, this is the time for the boss to express ideas and concerns and to begin a discussion about how to resolve differences.

The direct report needs to have a clear understanding of what the boss expects, those things the employee needs to do more of or less of to improve. Be sure to communicate the "why" behind the "what." Compliment efforts the direct report has made to move projects forward and offer suggestions when people seem stuck. However, communicate clearly that *results* matter. In other words, effective feedback concentrates

on what the direct report has *accomplished* not what he or she spent time *attempting* to accomplish.

Develop a Plan For Action

The action plan is a fluid document that should change with new information, accomplishments, unexpected events, and learning. Working together, the boss and direct report need to prioritize goals and objectives to identify the current most important two. Timelines for goals help this process. Sometimes the timeline will be obvious. At other times, timelines will need to be created, often in response to new initiatives or demands. Some people have the capacity to break large projects into manageable parts; others need direction from the boss to do so.

The main payoff of action plan is not the form or the document but the *discussion*. Once the employee and boss know what is needed and expected, each has identified roadblocks, and the timeline is clear, the action plan is apparent.

This does not imply that writing the action plan is optional. A written action plan is the tangible agreement among the stakeholders. It serves as a kind of report card for tracking results and re-directing efforts. Therefore, both the boss and the direct report should keep a copy of the original agreement and the subsequent notes and changes. This final step of the GLAD Communication Method will help you better understand what your direct report is committed to accomplishing, the first step in knowing that person better.

Know The People Who Report to You

As bosses who use the GLAD Communication Method know, the best and easiest first step to getting to know the people who report to you is to listen to them. Once you have that basic tool in your toolbox, you will be ready for the more sophisticated applications of this tool, techniques that will equip you to build a culture that allows people to be motivated and productive.

Much has been written about motivation, but the simplest way to know what your direct reports are thinking and feeling is to ask them and listen to their responses. This can and should be done routinely throughout the year, but at least a couple times a year, bosses should invite direct reports to give more focused feedback. These conversations should not occur at the same time that performance appraisals occur, however. This is

not you giving your direct report feedback; it's the other way around. It's your opportunity to really listen to what they need from you.

I recommend a simple, ten question format with a ten point rating scale. This scale allows you to debrief in percentages and makes things pretty clear to both the direct report and the boss. Once you put this process in place, your direct reports will start to expect the email that asks them to fill out the questionnaire and then schedule an appointment to debrief it. Filling out the questionnaire takes about five minutes, and the debrief takes about an hour. Both the boss and the direct report quickly learn that this is a painless, important process.

On a scale from 1-10, with 10 meaning you completely agree, rate the following:

1. I know what my boss expects of me.
2. I have the resources I need to do my job right.
3. My talents and skills are being utilized to their fullest extent.
4. My work is challenging.
5. If I want, I have the chance to advance in skills.
6. If I want, I have the chance to advance in responsibilities and position.
7. My boss gives me recognition and praise when I deserve it.
8. I know that my boss cares about me.
9. I can trust my boss to tell me the truth.
10. This company is committed to excellence.

There isn't anything magical about these ten questions. They are just the vehicle that will drive the discussions that you need to have with our direct reports to get to know them better. When you have the answers to these ten questions, you will know what you need to do to help each person feel valued and appreciated, feelings that help you improve your coaching of average employees and keep your top talent from walking out the door.

Help Direct Reports Leverage Their Strengths

Knowing your direct reports better and their talents is the first step to helping them leverage their strengths. Companies have only to look inside their four walls to find the wealth of unrealized capacity that resides in every employee. But this takes time, commitment to the process, listening, and discovering strengths; and quite frankly, bosses are more accustomed to operating under flawed assumptions. Most bosses take their direct reports' assets and skills for granted and focus performance reviews, feedback, and training on minimizing their weaknesses.

One more defect in their thinking is that they legislate work style. Determined to uphold standards, bosses often concentrate on *how* a direct report is doing a task rather than on that fact that she or he is doing it well in their own way. Policies and procedures are often critical factors to consider, but more often allowing people the freedom to choose how they will productive will ensure that they are.

Following the Platinum, not the Golden Rule, is another opportunity for bosses to help others use their strengths. The Golden Rule says that we should treat others the way we would like to be treated. The Platinum Rule states that you should treat others they way *they* want to be treated. But you will only know how they want to be treated is to ask them and to learn more about them.

Instead of appreciating our people for who and what they are, do we continue to try to make them something they are not? Certainly bosses should challenge their people to grow and learn, but why not concentrate on their strengths? I have read nothing that tells me Tiger Woods spends a great deal of time throwing baseballs so that he can be a better Major League contender. Instead of using his talents and energies where they don't belong, he uses his training time to become better at the game that he already dominates. Granted, there are parts of his game that are better than others, but he sticks with what he's good at. We know these truths from sports and nature, but we continue to do that which is counter-intuitive in business. It doesn't work in other arenas, and it won't work in your company either.

Finally, bosses frequently make the mistake of giving the squeaky wheel all the grease. Troublemakers, average or below average performers, and malcontents seem to

siphon a disproportionate amount of the boss's energy and attention. In essence, you are rewarding bad behavior by giving your attention to those who are doing things that you don't want, and you are denying your attention to the ones who deserve it.

Conclusion

Knowing your people and spotlighting each person's strengths will help you do your part to build an organization that can help each individual play to strengths and discover ways to consistently deliver perfect or nearly perfect performance. The high potentials in your group are the ones who will get the job done and take the organization to the next level of success. If you can help these people discover their assets and talents, and working together, you can coach them to realize their potential, you will build a boss/direct report relationship that people will hate to leave because they are GLAD you are their boss.

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