

Become the Boss No One Wants to Leave

By

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Why would anyone want to be led by you? That's the question that needs to frame your journey to becoming the boss no one wants to leave. If you have a hard time answering that one, try this one, "Would you want you for a boss?" When someone answers with a stare similar to a dog watching a ceiling fan, you can infer that the answer is "no." The next questions are, "What makes you think others want you for their boss?" and "What are you doing that you wouldn't want your boss to do?" As simple as the exercise is, it is eye opening in almost every case.

To become the boss no one wants to leave, you'll need to rouse others with confidence in you and inspire them with assurance in themselves. Lou Holtz, famed Notre Dame football coach, captured the essence of this daunting task in three questions:

1. Are you committed to excellence?
2. Can I trust you?
3. Do you care about me?

Lou Holtz's questions make it all very simple. Can your direct reports answer "yes" to all three?

Are You Committed To Excellence?

People want to play on a winning team, and most realize that hard work and sacrifice make a team win. Football players suit up to practice in the 100 degree temperatures of August, not because they like it, but because they know it is part of attaining excellence. Your direct reports are no different. They expect you to demand what it takes to separate your company from the competition. From the time we are children, we understand that excellence requires hard work. People won't grouse about it if they think you are really striving for superiority.

The single worst thing that can happen to cause you to cease being excellent is that you will exhaust your intellectual capital and reach your level of incompetence.

Early in your career you dedicated yourself to learning, growing, and experiencing. Now, you are bogged down in the perpetual challenges of getting results. You become so busy *doing* that you forget about *learning*. You need to learn faster now, so take the time to learn how to learn. It can pay enormous dividends. Once you challenge yourself to learn new ways to improve your team's productivity, you will be equipped to make changes and to offer more coaching, all important first steps for building trust.

Can I Trust You?

Once your direct reports are sure that you are committed to personal and professional excellence, they will want to know if they can trust you. This particular question is, "Can I, your direct report, whose future, job satisfaction, and livelihood depend on your good judgment, trust you?" The answer needs to be "Yes. You can trust me to be open when I can be, to be honest and ethical all the time, to be predictable when I can be, and to admit my mistakes." Nobody is perfect, and nobody gets it right the first time or every time after that. Your direct reports know you aren't perfect, they just don't tell you that they know.

When you try to cover your mistakes, pretend they didn't happen, or worse yet, blame them on someone else, you can forget about sustaining, much less building trust for a long, long time. Winston Churchill said it best: "Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm." Churchill is a name that lives on because of his successes, but those who know history understand that he was not without his fiascos or his critics. You won't be either; it's just one of those nasty realities of being in charge.

Do You Care About Me?

There's little argument that a great boss also needs to be a great coach. But an often overlooked concept is the boss's role as cheerleader, the person who strives to rally enthusiasm and energy so that the team can play on, even when encountering a tougher team in a dirty fight. Observe the coaches on the sidelines of any high stakes competition. Is there much difference between them and the cheerleaders? The cheerleaders jump more and wear cuter clothes, but they are fundamentally doing the same thing. Like an animated cheerleader, the job of the boss is to be the Energizer Bunny for your direct

reports. It's the boss's duty to be the power source that others know they can rely on. What if you don't feel energetic? Fake it.

Conclusion

Chances are, no matter how hard you try, you won't be a leader who will be remembered in the history books. Your name won't be uttered in the same breath as Churchill, Ghandi, Eisenhower, or even Lou Holtz. People won't write books decades from now and include your quotes; neither will most remember you at all. That only happens to a handful of people who are blessed or cursed with circumstances and characteristics that coalesce in the right combinations during the exact times they are needed, with too many moving parts and variables to control.

Perhaps you don't have discretionary power to allocate large sums of money for developing all the ideas that you have, but you do have governance over your own behaviors. You can begin with one or two goals that will make small but important moves in the right direction. For instance, you can commit to better listening; you can pledge to others that you will increase the number of performance management conversations you have throughout the year; you can promise to hold better meetings; you can give you word that you will take steps to know your direct reports better so that you understand their strengths and can help to build their hope for the future. Not one of these costs money, yet any one will help you take important steps toward causing your direct reports to answer "yes" to Lou Holtz's three questions and to becoming the boss that no one wants to leave. So, put on your own oxygen mask first and lead the way to become the boss that no one wants to leave.

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