

8 Ways to Become Everyone's Favorite Boss

Entrepreneur

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It's easy to understand why the motto "Work hard and be nice to people" is so popular. Not only is it short and memorable, but it reminds us how valuable often overlooked traits like diligence and kindness are in the workplace. With that in mind, I've created a detailed guide corporate leaders can follow to become bosses valued and liked by their employees. It's not always easy -- this sort of leadership requires a light touch and the ability to put out fires without burning bridges -- but the following eight tips are a good place to start.

1. Don't try to be the "cool boss."

Appearing authoritative but down-to-earth can be a hard balance to maintain, and so boundaries are critical. While there are any number of ways to distinguish yourself as a leader, symbolic or superficial gestures mean little. Don't get caught up in dressing more formally, reserving a parking spot or having luxurious lunches catered. Instead, opt for more substantial differentiators such as being the first in and last out and exhibiting relentless enthusiasm. At the same time, resist the urge to relate to your employees by casually dropping in "just to chat" or by asking to join them for lunch. Let these relationships develop naturally and don't worry about whether you're seen as a friend or confidant. That's not your job.

2. Remember your workforce is not your family.

You and your staff are teammates, close friends even, but you're not a family. Every company benefits from a healthy culture, but don't liken it to the intensity and obligation that comes with the word "family." This doesn't mean you can't have inside jokes, but try not to introduce and enforce too many mottos or die-hard rules. Corporate culture and human capital strategies are vital, and they definitely needed a reboot from their stodgy 1980's Wall Street roots. Some culture is good and can prevent negative chatter, but too much culture can have the opposite effect.

3. Invite and embrace criticism.

This can be a more difficult rule to follow for leaders than for the rest of the company. I've seen plenty of well-meaning bosses try to implement an environment that welcomes constructive feedback, only to lose focus and snap at the first well-meaning employee who critiques their own performances. Give your team a format for addressing issues they may otherwise be too timid to mention, and show them their honesty and commitment to improving is appreciated by accepting criticism gracefully.

4. Don't be a target.

As a leader, you have the ability to choose your degree of visibility. There's a happy medium to be struck here: be around just enough to give people tangible things to like about you, but be absent enough that they can't find anything to dislike. Whenever possible, deliver good news, interesting developments, cool new hires, etc. at company-wide meetings. Try and take a few questions, maybe ones you've screened via email first. Carefully regulate your presence, but also pay close attention to the

tone of your interactions. Even if you are funny, don't be tempted to be the funny boss. Remember-- if a joke lands, it will probably offend *someone*, and if it doesn't land, it will offend everyone.

5. Use competitors as motivators.

If you ever sense a rumbling in the halls, a dip in morale or general discontent, diverting attention to an external 3rd party can be a great way to mediate tension. Spend a month talking about a competitor and how each of your employees can enhance your company's competitive edge by embracing their killer instinct and desire to win. Do you have an upcoming product launch, conference or public appearance? Focus on that external deadline and create a narrative that hones employees' desire to meet it. This is a sound motivational technique, as teams often perform better when they can rally against an external force. People tend to see their lives in terms of simple plot structures with a cast of heroes and villains; give them the right villains, and you'll improve your chance of being a hero.

6. Give out free perks.

Free stuff moves mountains. People love gifts and the people who give them, so take advantage of the opportunity to be a source of joy and generosity. This practice goes beyond handing out company t-shirts and other forgettable swag. Give your employees something they'll remember. For those of you that already pay for employee meals, snacks, booze, and raffles, you'll probably have to think outside the box on this one. Even if your employees are spoiled, an unexpected freebie is invaluable for its ability to stimulate psychological attachment and loyalty. When in doubt, who doesn't love freebie tech gadgets?

7. Ask for small favors.

Everyone wants to feel needed. Approach your employees off-the-cuff and ask them to do a quick job that they can easily accomplish but that doesn't make you appear petty for asking. You can do this with every employee whose job title you actually understand. Jim in IT would be happy to spend 30 minutes looking into the most sophisticated voice-to-type apps for you, and doing so will subtly ingratiate you to him. Be sure to stipulate that your requests shouldn't take too long. That way, people will be more likely to let you know if the task you assigned was unintentionally difficult.

8. Publically apologize for your mistakes.

Fallibility is an important quality, but more important is the emotional currency earned from a public and sincere apology. Apologies are powerful and bely a sense of empathy, virtue and corporate responsibility. Once again, you'll need a mild touch here. Don't out yourself by apologizing for a massive, reputation-scarring mistake, but don't try and apologize for not restocking the snack supply in a timely fashion (you'll appear ridiculous). Focus on medium size mistakes, and craft your apology accordingly.