

## Be a Great Boss:

# Your Key to Engaged Employees and Successful Organizations

by Rachel Brozenske, Vice President, Allison Partners

Especially in economically challenging times, employee engagement is no longer a “nice to have” for successful organizations. According to Gallup Management research, organizations that score above the median on measures of employee engagement realize an average of 1.7 times the financial performance of other organizations. Further research by Gallup and others indicates that the relationship between an employee and his or her supervisor is one of the key drivers of employee engagement.

So how do we improve these relationships in our organizations? And what makes a great boss? The team at Allison Partners, an organizational development consultancy, has worked with employees, supervisors and executives in public, private and non-profit organizations and has identified seven common attributes of great bosses.

- *A great boss provides context so employees know what happens in the organization around them and how they are relevant.* Not only does this context help employees improve their work, but it’s also a key ingredient to employees’ ability to find and create meaning. Employees consistently report that clear links between their roles and an organization’s purpose and mission help make work more rewarding.
- *A great boss sets measureable goals and is clear about his or her expectations.* Great bosses know that most employees want to achieve success at work. Since few of us are adept mind readers, great bosses take the time to explain their expectations and set goals that help employees measure their own work.
- *A great boss is like Goldilocks, balancing between the pitfalls of under-management and the traps of micro-management.* Recent management trends have resulted in what Bruce Tulgan, author of *It’s Okay to Be the Boss: The Step-by-Step Guide to Becoming the Manager Your Employees Need*, calls “an undermanagement epidemic.” Great bosses know that a hands-off approach can be as frustrating for employees as constant interference.
- *A great boss makes tough choices with a proactive approach, refusing to adopt a victim’s mentality.* Great bosses assume the responsibility of leading and advocating for their employees and are courageous decision makers. Employees may not always like their bosses’ choices, but they generally prefer the clarity that results.

- *A great boss prevents anonymity, taking a genuine interest in each employee and demonstrating that interest with curiosity and empathy.* Gallup’s research indicates that engaged employees report that their supervisors “seem to care about me as a person.” Great bosses use curiosity to find out what makes each employee tick.
- *A great boss invites employees’ input and feedback and uses that information to improve thinking and communication.* Great bosses know that, unlike our political system, work is rarely a democracy. While employees don’t always have a vote, great bosses find ways to seek input, actively listen, and learn from feedback.
- *A great boss adapts his or her management approach to suit each unique employee.* Rather than treating all employees in the same “ideal” way, great bosses know that employees have different preferences for communication, decision-making, planning and other job functions. Great bosses ask questions to learn about employee preferences and customize their approaches accordingly.

These seven characteristics can be difficult to master. Fortunately, there’s one practice that, when implemented, has consistently been shown to help supervisors improve their performance in these dimensions. The great bosses’ secret? Spend scheduled time, one-on-one, with each direct report each week. In 15 minutes or so each week, great bosses listen and talk about current work, clarifying priorities, reinforcing procedures, providing resources and sharing feedback. Great bosses use this time to talk like a coach, with a steady and consistent message and tone.

Whether you’re a boss or an employee or both, your time is valuable. It can be hard to carve 15 minutes each week out of busy schedules. Ease in. Start with one employee. Within a few weeks, you’ll likely find time savings that allow you to expand your efforts. Soon you’ll observe results – improved performance, higher productivity, more commitment – that show you’re on the path to being a great boss.

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