

A good boss is hard to find

by Michael_Kinsman

The second hardest job in today's work world is to be a good boss.

The hardest job in today's work world is to work for a bad boss.

This is the kind of thing that should drive senior executives and human resources people nuts. But does it?

Not very often.

Because we live in a world where the boss is, well, the boss, the decisions handed down come with some sort of preordained respect. Even when they are bad decisions.

Dealing with bad bosses is something employers simply are not good at it. Maybe it stems from the fact that the employer hired the boss so the boss must be good. And, if the boss isn't, that's confirmation that the employer isn't doing a very good job.

If you don't believe that, look at your own experiences. If you're like most people you probably have run up against one or two bad bosses in your work life, maybe more. But how many of those bosses ever got fired? A popular way of dealing with a bad boss is to transfer them to a lateral job, which just seems an exercise in futility and will probably let that individual screw up another department.

Or maybe the boss is demoted or fired. That might sound like a reasonable way of dealing with the problem, but it just isn't very common.

The most common way companies deal with bad bosses is to do nothing. That's right, just let things go and hope they will get better.

Industrial psychologist Bruce Katcher is well aware of this issue. In his new book, "30 Reasons Employees Hate Their Managers" (American Management Association, \$21.95), Katcher, president of Discovery Surveys management consulting in Sharon, Mass., learned long ago that one of the primary reasons people switched jobs is because of the difficulty they had getting along with their supervisors.

Katcher rationally looks at why so many bad bosses exist and he comes up with six reasons employers have such a hard time finding good supervisors.

- The difficulty of supervision: Juggling issues such as how to motivate employees, how to solve job problems and resolve people issues is a difficult task. Few supervisors can handle all three well.

- The Peter Principle: Organizations often promote those who have excelled at a particular job task, not because they have demonstrated good leadership or people skills. Because leadership and people skills are essential to good management, this raises questions of competency among the hiring agents.

- Poor hiring practices: Employers rarely focus on hiring people with good potential for supervising others. Instead, they are inclined to look at technical skills. The ability to motivate others and to solve complex people problems are rarely considered during the hiring process.

- Lack of recognition: Pay raises and promotions are rarely based on how well supervisors actually do their jobs.

- Lack of training: Most organizations do a poor job of training supervisors.

- Lack of good role models: Excellent senior managers who mentor and guide other supervisors are typically the exception rather than the rule. Instead, it is often the blind leading the blind.

It really is a daunting task to hire supervisors who will be able to motivate employees and handle the attendant problems that come along with the job. But that's no reason to avoid striving to do that.

Too many human resources officers seem willing to cross their fingers and hope that things work out, that the new supervisor has or develops the core skills necessary for the job quickly. Maybe that's what they have to do.

But certainly when it becomes obvious that managers are struggling in their jobs, companies have to do something. They either have to provide guidance and training to managers or they have to find them jobs - either inside or outside the company - that match the supervisor's talent.

The ramifications a bad boss can have inside the company make this too important to let it go unchecked.

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