

Idiosyncrasies of Bosses

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Abstract

There have been numerous articles and books on “Bosses”, besides colloquiums, seminars and other chat rooms where the matter has been dealt with! Leadership was assigned to one on the basis of his position, basically amongst a group or hierarchy possessing the ability to lead an organization, team or a group of people. A leader is one who is supposed to motivate, achieve, or progress a process, project or an assignment. Leaders are not born but made, after several years of exposure, hard work and intelligence. Exposure to a variety of experiences makes a good leader.

“Leadership is the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants. The man who successfully marshals his human collaborators to achieve...” Harvard Business Review

Leadership is an art. A method adopted by the leader to make the entire team work for the betterment of the work, project, management or a targeted assignment! How the bosses act tends to be the subject matter of this article – ‘their idiosyncrasies’! It is well known that there are four styles of leaders - autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, and paternalistic, as defined by Kurt Lewin, the psychologist. Delving deep into their fields of operation, it would become clear that it is the type of industries / organizations where they had involved themselves with for several periods of time that they got transformed into accepting one of these leadership styles. As a leader, he should possess impeccable character, communication skills of a high order – capable of convincing and influencing his collaborators and above all a person who commands the respect of all his followers.

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I. Introduction

Businesses world-wide is facing numerous problems, fast technological changes, availability of good leaders, competition in the face of procuring suitable workforces, innovations galore and the like. Obviously, all these lead to the fact that the driving workforce – “the boss”, should be agile enough and have the resilience to face these various factors and survive!

Indian businesses are much different from those in other major developed countries! Most of the corporate houses in India and their shares are controlled by the “investing bosses”, who need departmental bosses to dance to the tune of their idiosyncrasies! Be it manufacturing, trading, transport and now even educational institutions, the investor’s word is the last call! This then, decides the characteristics and nature of the business being run.

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II. Characteristics of Bosses

Leadership traits of bosses is mostly dictated by the type of industry they are associated with. This is a topic that has been most frequently discussed, and psychologists are still to find a real answer – in a fast-changing world of innovations and severe competition. The definition of Kurt Lewin depicting the four styles of bosses- autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, and paternalistic - seems to be changing! Though India is supposed to reap the benefits of a demographic dividend, shortage of top-level leaders seems to be affecting many businesses. Further, large numbers of retrenchments taking place, coupled with lack of a skilled force, can upset the economic assessments and futures!

Beyond all these, a boss should fundamentally have an unquestionable, impeccable character – integrity; possess a clear vision, a well curated and defined strategy, and created an all-inclusive, intellectually framed stimulating environment, an all-out effort and commitment in developing his fellow employees to their full potential, apart from a glowing balance sheet!

Philip Kotler, the marketing guru, defines trustworthy and good leaders as those who “communicate and act in a consistent manner, protect the organization and employees, embody the organization’s vision and values, consult with and listen to key stakeholders, communicate openly with others, value employees and offer support to employees and key stakeholders”.

III. Characteristics & Habits That a Good Boss Should Possess

Meetings, Appointments, Seminars, Webinars

In a well ordained system, the boss is the main person who could set standards. He should be punctual at meetings and such occasions, and should observe enough decorum to address his participants, besides being well prepared. He should also bring with him some printed copies of details (if they are very important or too digitised) for distribution, in which case he could talk only about those that need to be emphasised upon.

On the contrary, a boss who does not care for punctuality, totally unprepared, extempore talk, displays his indifference towards the subject of his meeting, disrespect to the audience; making the entire assembly annoyed. His superiors may not be able to tolerate such type of behaviour and even his existence in the organization may be at stake!

Shifting the blame on others

Many a time, circumstances go beyond one's control. It may not be possible to accomplish a certain task, may be due to personal reasons, or the assumptions in a particular problem one had taken had not worked out well; and in such cases it is easy for one to blame the circumstances, in defence of your incompetence or inability to perform. In such cases, it would be quite acceptable to accept the blame rather than on shifting it on some other cause. Acceptances of mistakes is a sign of humility, of being sincere towards one's ability to manage difficult situations, and reflects on the maturity of one to accept problems!

Expression of gratitude

Expression of gratitude to those who had helped you in various aspects, be it your teachers, guides, seniors, students or fellow workers is normally a welcome attitude! It exhibits a positive attitude towards the whole gamut of operations, where a large number of persons have helped you to succeed. It could be a currency which you can really mint on later!

Performing Just That and Nothing Else, In an organization

As a boss, if one feels that it is just sufficient to perform only that which he is ordained to do, then it does not become well of a good manager. In case one finishes his task or goal, he should venture out and ask his super bosses whether he could undertake anything else to do, for he has much time left at his disposal. This would create a path for his rise in the hierarchical levels in his organization faster than what he would rather accomplish otherwise. This definitely highlights his ingenuity and leadership qualities.

Avoiding Politics and Gossip – Remain Positive

As a boss, he must stay clear of politics, rumours, gossips and other unhealthy discussions that may take place in the organization. Another way of avoiding negativity, is to surround oneself with positive people all the time – this could help the organization to grow.

Bragging About Themselves or Self-Aggrandisement

There are a set of bosses who always try to talk about their achievements all the time, but remain aloof, and are only concerned about themselves. Empathy is the last word with them. Such bosses consider vulnerability as a weakness. Some of this type also goad on persons within their control to perform, their main task is to project themselves rather their fellow workers.

Such bosses who constantly brag about themselves psychologically help others in the organisation also to rise up to the occasion, to meet his targets. No doubt this helps the organisation in a way, but at the same time. At times, the boss who talked about his accomplishments was mistaken and identified as arrogant. If the boss on the other hand is admired by his co-workers and subordinates, then whatever he might talk about his own successes would goad the others to work better to achieve the same laurels one day! Successes talked about by the boss should be humanly achievable so that many in the team would be eager to achieve the same.

IV. Idiosyncrasies of Bosses

When one thinks of idiosyncrasies of bosses, going down memory lane, one cannot forget the first of the novels in the satirical domain by Spanish Novelist and Playwright Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, and his novel *Don Quixote* dating back to the seventeenth century, based on the “questionable sanity of a person who later becomes a knight”, accompanied by his squire Sancho!

Some of modern-day bosses are cynical in a variety of ways. In most cases, current day leaders continue following the same paths that they were exposed to in the earlier days, without realizing that their juniors have come out with newer techniques and better knowledge bases. Such leaders find it hard to change their behaviour, and this increasingly tends to be more serious, being detrimental to the organizations as well as their juniors; and this needs to end.

Clinton O. Longenecker and Laurence S. Fink have classified “the awful 13” types of bosses. Such bosses should necessarily change their style of working without which they could cause a severe damage to the working relationships with their co-workers or subordinates; can impact workloads, working hours, attitudes and workplace stability. The most awful 13, have been listed as “mystery bosses, ego-maniacal bosses, emotionally un-intelligent bosses, Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde bosses, non-communicative bosses, clueless bosses, firefighting bosses, un-realistic bosses, in-decisive bosses, status-quo bosses, lone ranger bosses, jealous bosses and un-scrupulous bosses”.

In any case, it is the organisation that would suffer, or the co-workers / subordinates who would be in constant trouble, in that a congenial workplace would not exist unless they cooperate with the idiosyncrasies of these bosses! Employee frustration is bound to develop anytime with such types of bosses.

V. Conclusions

Prof. Narayan Pant the Raoul de Vitry d'Avaucourt Chaired Professor of Leadership Development at INSEAD in his view feels “it can be difficult for leaders to change their behaviours; and indicates a four-step behaviour – cultivating awareness, making a commitment to change, overcoming interferences and putting new behaviours into practice”. Any industry, organisation or a social set-up could only be successful and grow, if the working environment is excellent both for the leaders and for the co-workers.

Adjusting leadership style, being flexible enough to suit the particular situation, with different types of people and differing situations is a must for a good leader! They should also be good learners, mentors and constantly be on the lookout to build strong relationships with and amongst team members, towards achieving the targets set up. It is up to the bosses to maintain this environment. In a fast-changing world of competition it becomes very necessary for such an environment for growth, be it an industry, a social movement or any organisation that looks forward. Just innovations, and the right type of contributors would not suffice, if the leader is not that tuned to meet the obligations of the contributing workers – a nice environment and an empathetic leadership.

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