

LIKE A BOSS, OR A LEADER?

There is a difference. It's time to drop old-school thinking and learn new behaviors.

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The big challenge for so many executives is that they have been reared in “boss mode” rather than in the culture of leadership.

Bosses too often believe that they have to come up with all the innovative answers. Consequently, their people will sit and wait for the boss's next epiphany. It's old-school thinking.

Most entrepreneurial ventures are born because someone on a lower level within a company had a good idea, but the boss didn't listen. When companies instead have leaders of the ilk defined by Thomas L. Friedman in his June 2011 *The New York Times* column, they continue to flourish and evolve toward the next level as opposed to becoming stifled and destined to “expire.”

Friedman says, “The role of leaders today is to inspire, empower, enable, and then edit and meld all that innovation coming from the bottom up.”

Why? Because even bosses eventually run out of creative ideas. With that

in mind, you have to ask yourself if you are an extreme or a reluctant boss.

With some bosses, in extreme cases, there's not much that can be done. They build a cadre of yes-men around them and everyone waits for their command or their next crazy idea to execute. But at least the yes-men have jobs — although sometimes at pay beyond their true value because of blind obedience and loyalty.

In these challenging economic times, there are also many enterprises stagnating because their people wait for their boss to paint the picture of what the company will look like going forward. These reluctant bosses don't know any better. They have just grown up in different organizational cultures.

On the other hand, good leaders build up the confidence and talents of people around them and nurture their creative ideas. That's call new-school thinking.

Here are three behaviors that will transform reluctant bosses to effective leaders.

■ **Education and learning.** Good leaders have a great appetite for learning, especially in regard to cultivating more effective ways of motivating people and building positive and innovative environments. Good leaders focus on thought leadership and create a learning environment for all. Bosses, on the other hand, participate in little of the education and learning aspects because they believe they know it all already. Sound familiar to anyone?

When executives stop learning, their leadership prowess begins to wane.

■ **Focus on your people, not yourself.** Traditional bosses are generally described as people with big egos. In other words, they're more focused on themselves and their own prowess and generally have scant regard for the capabilities of their people.

On the other hand, smart leaders focus on building and encouraging their people. They invariably have associates around them that they respect and appreciate. Humility trumps ego every time.

■ **Let people take risks and make mistakes.** Once you take a leadership posture toward people, you will be open to letting them learn from their mistakes. Remember, creating an atmosphere of risk-taking is very healthy. By doing so, they will discover and innovate. Who knows — one out of every five interesting ideas may bear real potential.

As their leader, your job is to assemble resources and talents, as well as create a vision for the company, focused on innovation. Whenever setbacks occur, and they will, you must encourage the innovator to hang in there — your support and patience will be required.

Again, remember that innovation comes from all those talented people operating within your organization. Your people probably have many unrecognized talents, which, when harnessed properly, could put your enterprise on an exciting new track.

So give up on being an atypical boss and try leadership instead — the results will speak for themselves. <<



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