

Introduction

There's all sorts of rhetoric about what good bosses should and shouldn't do these days. I guess that's a good thing. Unfortunately, most of it's pretty basic, generic fluff that sort of blends together after a while.

Even worse, a lot of it's, well, utopian. It panders to what employees want to hear instead of giving truly practical and insightful advice on what makes a manager effective in the real world where business is everything and everything's on the line.

This list is different. It's different because, to derive it, I went back in time to the best characteristics of the best CEOs (primarily) I've worked for and with over the past 30 years. It's based entirely on my own experience with executives who made a real difference at extraordinary companies.

Some were big, some were small, but all were successful in their respective markets, primarily because of the attributes of these CEOs. Each anecdote taught me a critical lesson that advanced my career and helped me to be a better leader. Hope you get as much out of reading it as I did living it.

Source: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/10-things-great-managers-do/>

1. Maintain your cool and sense of humor

Maintain your cool and sense of humor, especially during a crisis. When our biggest customer - and I mean big - thought I leaked a front-page story to the press, I offered to resign to save the relationship. My boss, a great CEO, gave me a serious look, like he was thinking about it, and said, "You're not getting off that easy." Then he broke into a big smile.

2. Tell subordinates they're shooting themselves

Tell subordinates when they're shooting themselves in the foot. Sometimes I can be pretty intimidating and I've had CEOs who shied away from giving it to me straight when my emotions got the better of me. Not this one guy. We'd be in a heated meeting and he'd quietly take me aside and read me the riot act. He was so genuine about it that it always opened my eyes and helped me to achieve perspective.

3. Be the boss, but behave like a peer.

Be the boss, but behave like a peer. I've worked with loads of CEOs who let their egos get the better of them. They act like they're better than everyone else, are distant and emotionally detached, or flaunt their knowledge and power. That kind of behavior diminishes leaders, makes them seem small, and keeps them from really connecting with people. They're not always the most successful, but the most admired CEOs I know are genuinely humble.

4. Let your guard down

5. Stand behind and make big bets

Stand behind and make big bets on people you believe in. One CEO would constantly challenge you and your thinking to the point of being abusive. But once he trusted and believed in you, he put his full weight behind you 100 percent to help you succeed. He'd stand up for you even when he wasn't sure what the heck you were up to. And he'd give you new functional responsibilities - something up-and-coming execs need to grow. Okay, he wasn't perfect, but who is?

6. Complement your subordinate's weaknesses.

Complement your subordinate's weaknesses. I often say it's every employee's job to complement her boss's weaknesses. The only reason that's even doable is because we've all only got one boss. But I actually had a CEO who did that with each and every one of his staff. For example, I'm more of a big picture strategy guy and he would really hold my feet to the fire by tracking my commitments. It felt like micromanaging at first, but I eventually realized it helped me to be a more effective and strengthened the entire management team..

7. Compliment your employee's strengths

Compliment your employee's strengths. It takes a strong, confident leader to go out on a limb and tell an employee what they're great at. Why? I don't know, but I suspect it's hard for alpha males that primarily inhabit executive offices. Anyway, it's important because we can't always see ourselves objectively. Twenty years ago a CEO identified how effectively I cut through a boatload of BS to reach unique solutions to tough problems. Today, that's what I do for a living.

8. Teach the toughest, most painful lessons

Teach the toughest, most painful lessons you've ever learned. As a young manager at Texas Instruments, I once asked my boss's boss for advice about a promotion I didn't get. He told me a candid story about the hardest lesson he'd ever learned, the reason he was stuck in his job. He made himself indispensable and didn't groom his replacement. It was painful for him to share, but it opened my eyes and made a huge difference in my career

9. Do the right thing

Do the right thing. Just about everyone says it, but I've only known one CEO who both preached and practiced it to the point where it became a big part of the company culture. You'd walk the halls and hear people say it all the time. He meant two things by it. When he said it to you, it meant he trusted you to do just that. He also meant it regardless of status quo or consequences. He had extraordinary faith in that phrase. Now I do too.

10. Do what has to be done, no matter what

Let your guard down and really be yourself outside of work. You know, teambuilding is so overrated. All you really need to do outside of work to build a cohesive team is break some bread, have some drinks, relax, let your guard down, and be a regular human being. When you get to be really confident, you can be that way all the time. That's the mark of a great leader.

Do what has to be done, no matter what. It's a rare executive who jumps on a plane at a moment's notice to close a deal or gives an impromptu presentation when a potential investor shows up unexpectedly. It's even more rare when he does it without asking questions or hemming and hawing about it. He just does what has to be done. That kind of drive and focus on the business is relatively common with entrepreneurs in high-tech startups. And it's the mark of a great manager who will find success, that's for sure..



By **[deleted]**
cheatography.com/deleted-2754/

Not published yet.
Last updated 25th December, 2017.
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