

Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP

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EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS



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Your Team's Best Interests - Part two ▶ 02/02/12

"People quit their bosses."

After two of Brendan's direct reports transferred to other divisions and another left the company, I became concerned that Brendan might be the sort of boss reflected in the saying, "People don't quit their jobs, they quit their bosses."

He and I began discussing how leaders can demonstrate they have their employees' best interests at heart. Over time we discussed eleven different behaviors. I introduced five in [last month's Executive Coaching Tip](#). Here are the other six.

1 Be the resource they need

In an entertainment company, a vice-president of operations repeatedly complained to me that she couldn't get on her boss's calendar. Instead, she resorted to lengthy emails that she suspected went unread.

In a financial management company, a department head was responsible for weekly reports that the traders and risk managers used. He worked almost every weekend because data from one group was consistently delivered late. When his peer in that group failed to address the problem, he asked his boss to exert pressure on *that* group's boss. But nothing changed.

In a retail company, a director believed her promotion was imminent: all she needed was for her boss to sign off on her performance review. The problem was that she'd worked for her boss for four years and had never received even *one* performance review.

In each case, the resource the employees needed was their boss's time or advocacy. Even though you, like so many others, may struggle under a do-more-with-less workload, you need to prioritize the legitimate needs of your direct reports.

To show your employees you have their best interests at heart, you need to be available to them: as a resource, no one can substitute for you.

2 Provide professional development

Denise was charged with creating a new team that would pursue one specific customer group. After she'd established the team, she carved out three hours each month for them to become a learning community: they practiced presenting in front of each other and received video feedback.

Her commitment to the team's professional development was undeniable. And she put herself in front of the group to receive feedback, too.

As a boss, providing the budget for learning isn't enough; you need to create a culture for it. Do you attend conferences and classes? If so, I'd guess you urge your direct reports to attend their own learning events. I'd also guess that they view attendance as a perk and an investment the company is making in them.

I have never forgotten the vice-president who, at an off-site with two dozen members of his team, chided all of them. "Each of you has budget for your own professional development," he told them, "and not one of you used your entire budget last year. You have to do better this year."

Great message, don't you think? Make your direct reports put their own professional development high on their priority list.

3 Offer career development

When Wendy and I first met, she asked me more questions about myself than any other client before or since. I didn't feel she was grilling me; rather, I sensed she wanted to know who I was and how I fit into the pattern of people she'd met throughout her life. People interested Wendy.

I came to find out that her interest in people led her to schedule time with each of her direct reports that was specifically dedicated to discussing their careers. I wasn't surprised when the vice-president of human resources told me that the company was peppered with people Wendy had helped place.

Another leader gave all his direct reports the book *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, and followed up with a one-on-one meeting to talk about how their strengths might influence their future opportunities.

Having an eye on your direct reports' careers is different from supporting their professional development. Professional development gives people skills to be more effective in the job they have today. Focusing on someone's career, however, aims at a time in the future when your direct report may no longer be your direct report, or may not even be in the same company or the same business.



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When you focus on someone's career, you step out of the role of boss. You align yourself shoulder to shoulder with your employee, both facing that person's future.

Aligning yourself beside your employee means subordinating your immediate business needs and focusing on what's best for that person's long-range growth and satisfaction. Not easy, but absolutely in that person's best interest.

4 Be fair

Daniel was a poor hire but his boss, Rebecca, was concerned that if she let him go she wouldn't be allowed to replace him. She was determined to help him succeed. Four months later, her team began to fall apart because no one else on her team was getting her attention.

Roger had the opposite tendency. When he identified a high performer, that person gained all sorts of opportunities and access; and, as his team well knew, he would dismiss and minimize other people's accomplishments.

Being fair is difficult because the various players on your team aren't equal: people naturally have a wide range of performance.

But would it be fair to treat your high performers and your low performers the same? I don't think it would.

What concerned me for both Rebecca and Roger was that they weren't conscious of how they were allocating their time and how they were impacting their team.

To let people know you have their best interests at heart, choose thoughtfully how you will treat your high potentials, your low performers, and the bulk of the folk in between.

For example, if you could give only a few of your people coaches, would you give coaches to the highest performers as a reward? Or to your lowest performers as remedial treatment?

Whatever you decide, would you be willing to make the same choice consistently over a period of years? After all, people feel fairness (or unfairness) most deeply when a pattern emerges over time.



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5 Tell your team how to succeed with you

Managing Your Boss was first published in Harvard Business Review back in 1979 by John Kotter and John Gabarro. It became an instant classic and has been updated and republished two times since. I value the article so highly, I wrote an [Executive Coaching Tip about it in 2007](#).

The authors urge employees to understand the boss's work style, goals, strengths and pressures. Without that understanding, they say a manager is "flying blind ... and unnecessary conflict, misunderstanding and problems are inevitable." Inevitable? Yikes!

One way to avoid those problems is for you to proactively tell your reports, "Here's how to succeed with me." Then employees can use that knowledge to develop their relationship with you.

Clients often tell me how they like to receive information, or how they want people to prep for staff meetings, or how often they want to be updated about certain projects. And when their direct reports don't do those things, they become understandably upset. But when I ask, "Have you told your people what you've told me?" I often hear, "I shouldn't have to tell them!"

Really? Why not? Did you hire a team of clairvoyants? If you were so easy to read, they'd probably already be giving you what you want: I doubt they come to work aiming to annoy you.

Communicating clearly how to succeed with you is one more way to have your employees' best interests at heart.

To purchase the HBR article for a nominal fee, [click here](#).

6 Share the view from your vantage point

Andrew was a senior manager at a global software company. His buddy, Rohith, was a peer in a related business group. Over lunches, Rohith repeatedly told Andrew information that affected both their groups but which Andrew had never heard. When he'd ask his boss about it, the boss would confirm it was true.

It became apparent that Rohith's boss told her team what happened in her boss's staff meetings. On the other hand, Andrew's boss, who attended the same staff meeting, kept the information to himself.



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No matter how small or large your organization is, you have information that your employees don't have: strategic information about the company's future; cultural information about who can open certain doors; personal wisdom you've learned during your career.

The information you have may seem obvious and mundane to you but is completely inaccessible to your employees. When you share appropriate information with them, you broaden their vision, deepen their knowledge and show that you have their best interests at heart.

Early in my discussion with Brendan, he let me know that the two employees who'd transferred out of his group had both done so at his urging so they could capitalize on opportunities. And the person who'd left the company had done so with Brendan's hearty recommendation. Brendan allayed my original concerns in short order. But we pursued this conversation in depth because having his team's best interests at heart was a subject he cared about deeply.

He and I agreed that not every one of these eleven behaviors will be right for every leader in every company. Nor would they be meaningful to every employee. But in each case, they require that the leader think about employees from *their* point of view. Putting your team's best interests first is a powerful way to model *The Look & Sound of Leadership*TM.

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[Messaging During Hard Times](#)

[Performance Reviews](#)

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