

Sixteen Ways to Be a Better Boss Right Now

by Richard G. Ensman, Jr.

Your employees are your most important resource. Without them, it is impossible to sustain business growth. With them, you can do almost anything—if you bring out their best through great leadership and supervision. Here's how:

1. Set high standards. Do not be afraid to ask employees to stretch themselves, but make sure standards are specific and reachable.

2. Listen to your employees. Most employees do not like to criticize, and many do not even offer suggestions unless asked. So provide structured opportunities, such as staff meetings, listening sessions, surveys, or face-to-face brainstorming conferences, for your people to offer their thoughts.

3. Communicate your vision. Let your employees know what your publishing house's aim is. Share important business information: goals, operating results, key strategies. The result: you will give your people the chance to feel part of a team.

4. Affirm your people. Sincerely praise employees who use their unique skills. Publicly let your people know that you appreciate their work.

5. Remember the basics of good supervision. Things like weekly one-on-one meetings, systematic reporting, and informal checkups on each employee's work all signal that you are interested in your people—and ready and willing to help them.

6. Educate employees on policies. Do not assume that every employee understands every organizational or personnel policy. When new people come on board, or periodically for current staff, offer informal workshops on the reasons for your policies and the procedures to fulfill them. Make sure each employee has a copy of your policy manual.

7. Plan together. Involve your people as you develop goals and strategies to encourage interest and motivation.

8. Initiate special workplace projects. Examples: A new "sunshine" committee responsible for social activities. A monthly share-your-story luncheon. A task force to implement new software. The result: a boost in team spirit.

9. Use mistakes as learning opportunities. Mistakes happen. The employee who is allowed freedom to make mistakes—

and the opportunity to learn from them will be loyal and motivated.

10. Give responsibility. Delegate: a little at first, a lot later. Your people are capable of much more than you realize.

11. Seek out professional development opportunities.

Whether you're a novice or an experienced supervisor, you can always improve your supervisory and leadership skills. If possible make it a point each year to attend at least one workshop or class focusing on this subject.

12. Offer professional development to others. Just as you constantly strive to better yourself, encourage your people to do the same. Do not hesitate to send them to workshops, or even bring in training specialists. When it comes time for a good employee to move on, accept the transition with pride and enthusiasm.

13. Foster problem-solving skills. Some of your employees may be reluctant to take on complex tasks or solve problems on their own. When they bring problems to you, offer guidance and counsel—and then set them to work.

14. Discipline quickly and fairly. When you must reprimand an employee, explain what you are doing, and why, in a thoroughly professional manner. Then, get it over with and move on.

15. Seek out the best. When it is time to bring someone new on board, take the time to identify the kind of person you need, and carefully interview and evaluate candidates. The time you invest in the selection process will pay big dividends later on.

16. Say thanks. Everyone wants to be appreciated. When your employees know that you appreciate them, you will foster genuine team spirit—and motivate them to produce their best work. ❖

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