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I'm the Boss of You

*The High Cost of Poor
Leadership*

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“I’m the boss of you!” Douglas sternly informed his younger brother William.

William glared back at him, “You are not the boss of me!”

The two boys were surrounded by dozens of superhero action figures. The game they were playing wasn’t going to Douglas’s liking, so, as the older of the two, he pulled rank.

“I am Batman, and Batman is always the boss of Robin.” Douglas used a more conciliatory tone this time, hoping to sway William.

“Na-uh, Batman isn’t always the boss of Robin, and you’re not the boss of me.” William avoided looking at Douglas this time and continued to play with an action figure that was clearly the center of the argument.

Douglas suddenly became enraged. He was having none of it. He snatched the action figure from William’s hand and screamed

at him. “I am Batman, and if you want to play with me, you have to do what I say!”

William’s eyes welled with tears, his face a reflection of just how bad his feelings had been hurt. He mumbled back at Douglas, “I don’t want to be Robin anymore.” William left the room to find his mother (and tell on Douglas).

Batman sat alone on the playroom floor. *The boss of no one.*

Bad Bosses

Robert Hogan, researcher and author of *Personality and the Fate of Organizations*, found that 75 percent of the workforce feel that their bosses are the most stressful part of their jobs. His research also indicates that there are far more bad bosses than good ones. When you consider Hogan’s conclusions and the fact that virtually every worker has a supervisor, it is highly probable that you have worked for at least one horrible boss and this experience left an emotional scar.

If you want to experience the emotional impact of bad bosses, just ask someone to tell you about the worst boss they ever had. As soon as they begin describing their bad boss, deep emotions will emerge in the form of facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice—all evidence of the profound emotional scars left by incompetent, demanding, and hurtful leaders.

In the process of researching this book we asked this question hundreds of times. We quickly discovered that few people forget bad bosses. When asked about a bad boss, the visceral emotional reaction is almost always instantaneous. People become angry. Resentment oozes from every pore, and the desire to get even is palpable. Some of the stories are truly shocking. Some are sad. Most, however, follow a common theme:

Bad bosses are oblivious to the fact that leading people requires humility, savvy, authenticity, and keen interpersonal skills. They

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attempt to lead people as Douglas attempted to lead William, with the autocratic: “*I am the boss of you; therefore you must do what I say!*” When that doesn’t work (and it almost never does), bad bosses resort to manipulation, screaming, micromanagement, intimidation, fear, and even pouting to get what they want. Through these tactics they hurt people, destroy company cultures, and ultimately tear down organizations as the most talented people often just walk away.

The High Cost of Poor Leadership

Most leaders have heard the saying, “People don’t leave companies, they leave managers.” During our research for *People Follow You*, our interviewees quoted this saying to us time and again.

Even though this saying has become a cliché, it is the brutal truth. A quick search on the Internet reveals hundreds of articles on the subject. Countless studies and surveys of the workplace provide empirical evidence that how employees feel about their managers is a better predictor of long-term retention, satisfaction, and performance than any other factor.

Far too many people leave jobs and companies that they love because they hate their leader. In story after story about bad bosses, the ending was inevitable, “So I left my job and went somewhere else.”

Shelly explained to us why she left a great job selling online advertising for a top website and well-known brand:

I really liked my job. The company was a great place to work, I liked the people I worked with and because the company was so well known it was easy to get my foot in the door with new prospects. Over the years I had built a great client base, and I got a lot of referrals and repeat business. In six years with the company I had never, not once, missed a quota—NOT ONCE! When I finally quit I was 140 percent of my number for the year. I really

hated to leave, but when my old boss was promoted they brought in this guy who was the worst sales manager I ever had. Even though I was hitting all my numbers this guy micro-managed everything—he carried the policy book around with him and beat us up on all kinds of nonsense. My final straw was when he sat me down to have a conversation about my talk time. I was his number one sales rep for the quarter and yet he warned me that my average talk time was not meeting company standards. That was it for me. I resigned two weeks later. What an idiot!

Nelson, Adrian, Penny, and Sandy, all from different industries, told us virtually the same story. At times it was painful to listen to these stories about how poor managers had pushed great people, who really enjoyed their work and their companies, out the door. We heard about assholes, bullies, narcissists, micromanagers, do-nothings, and bosses who focused almost solely on preserving their own skin.

Millions of people leave jobs each year because of bad bosses, taking their experience, skills, and talents with them—often to competitors. Those who are willing to endure abusive bosses are far more likely to be less productive than workers who have competent leaders. A study by Florida State University (www.livescience.com/1929-abused-workers-fight-slacking.html) found that of people working for difficult bosses:

- Thirty percent slowed down or purposely made errors, compared with 6 percent of those not reporting abuse.
- Twenty-seven percent purposely hid from the boss, compared with 4 percent of those not abused.
- Thirty-three percent confessed to not putting in maximum effort, compared with 9 percent of those not abused.
- Twenty-nine percent took sick time off even when not ill, compared with 4 percent of those not abused.
- Twenty-five percent took more or longer breaks, compared with 7 percent of those not abused.

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One researcher said that “relationships between managers and employees are at an all-time low!” Are companies paying attention? Most are not, but they should be. Companies across all industries lose billions of dollars in lost productivity and turnover as a result of the incompetent, abusive, and belligerent leaders they employ.

According to Dinesh Weerakkody, CEO of HR Cornucopia:

Our research shows that if a company is losing top talent, first look to their immediate Boss. More than any other single reason, he may be the reason people stay and grow in an organization. And he's the reason why they quit, taking their knowledge, experience, and contacts with them. Many times, straight to competition. So much money today is being spent on initiatives to retain good people—in the form of better pay, stay bonuses, options, better perks and better training, reward and recognition programs—when, many of them may just be hygiene factors and in the end, the turnover of top talent could be a supervisor issue. (<http://print.dailymirror.lk/business/127-local/30703.html>)

It has always disturbed me how organizations will put into place elaborate (and often expensive) incentive systems designed at improving employee retention and productivity. Yet, other than lip service, are unwilling to hold their leaders accountable for employee satisfaction and retention. How many companies as part of their review system assess the emotional impact leaders have on their people? How many have incentives in place that reward productivity, employee retention, *and* overall workplace satisfaction? How many companies require future leaders to prepare for leadership through mentorship and training programs? How many companies teach leaders interpersonal leadership skills? Not many.

Instead, organizations come up with fancy slogans, programs, or national meetings focused on motivating their employees, forgetting that one bad boss can negate all of that investment and more. The relationship between employee and manager is the pivot

point on which most of an organization's success rests. Zeke Lopez, President of the Bus Concept, says that "companies can only grow by leveraging good leaders."

Leadership Is Personal

Leadership is personal. To think otherwise is to deny the very fabric of who we are as humans. People bring their own styles, cultures, morals, beliefs, ethics, and norms into the workplace, making one-size-fits-all leadership impossible. Your relationships with those you lead and their relationship with you are guided and influenced by these powerful drivers and sometimes illogical emotions. There are thousands upon thousands of articles, books, seminars, and university-level courses dedicated to teaching the mechanics of managing, coaching, and leading people. Organizations of all kinds regularly send their people to leadership-development training, spending literally billions on training current and future leaders. Yet studies, data, and our own research indicate that the state of leadership in the workplace is atrocious.

Why? Leaders at all levels fail at the interpersonal side of leadership—they forget or ignore the fact that leadership is personal. The primary reason why so many leaders fail at leadership is that they are unwilling to accept that leadership is, and always will be, about human relationships. They wrongly believe that just because they have the word *manager* printed on a business card or their name is on some company org chart, it is enough.

In business, to be called a leader, all you need is a title that says you are the supervisor, manager, director, or regional vice president. Being the leader, formally or informally, just means you are in charge. You are the boss—the people who work for you are obligated to do what you say . . . or else! They have to in order to keep their jobs because you have to the power to fire them.

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In interview after interview with well-respected leaders we heard the same mantra. The best leaders are the best relationship builders. These leaders understand that success as a leader is directly and entirely related to the quality of the relationships they build and sustain with the people they lead. All of the lessons taught in the myriad leadership courses and books are hollow unless and until you accept that even though your title, business card, or position on your company's org chart may declare, "*I am the boss of you,*" leadership begins when people choose to FOLLOW YOU for their reasons, not yours.

My Mission

This book is my soapbox. Poor leadership sub-optimizes profits and growth. It holds back good companies and good people. It wrecks productivity, steals joy from the workplace, and ultimately hurts real people. Like legions of others in the workplace, I'm sick and tired of dealing with bad bosses. I believe that leadership can be better and leaders of all experience levels can evolve into men and women who engender respect, loyalty, and admiration among those they lead.

My mission is to provide you with a framework for leading people in the modern workplace and ultimately to marry you to the indisputable fact that people don't follow companies, paychecks, incentives, stock options, fear, power, or fancy slogans—PEOPLE FOLLOW YOU.

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