10 Things Only Exceptional Bosses Give Employees

Good bosses have strong organizational skills. Good bosses have solid decision-making skills. Good bosses get important things done.

Exceptional bosses do all of the above -- and more. (And we remember them forever.) Sure, they care about their company and customers, their vendors and suppliers. But most importantly, they care to an exceptional degree about the people who work for them.

And that's why they're so rare.

Extraordinary bosses give every employee:

1. Autonomy and independence.

Great organizations are built on optimizing processes and procedures. Still, every task doesn't deserve a best practice or a micro-managed approach. (Here's looking at you, manufacturing industry.)

Engagement and satisfaction are largely based on autonomy and independence. I care when it's "mine." I care when I'm in charge and feel empowered to do what's right.

Plus, freedom breeds innovation: Even heavily process-oriented positions have room for different approaches. (Still looking at you, manufacturing.)

Whenever possible, give your employees the autonomy and independence to work the way they work best. When you do, they almost always find ways to do their jobs better than you imagined possible.

2. Clear expectations.

While every job should include some degree of independence, every job does also need basic expectations for how specific situations should be handled.

Criticize an employee for offering a discount to an irate customer today even though yesterday that was standard practice and you make that employee's job impossible. Few things are more stressful than not knowing what is expected from one day to the next.

When an exceptional boss changes a standard or guideline, she communicates those changes first -- and when that is not possible, she takes the time to explain why she made the decision she made, and what she expects in the future.

3. Meaningful objectives.

Almost everyone is competitive; often the best employees are extremely competitive--especially with themselves. Meaningful targets can create a sense of purpose and add a little meaning to even the most repetitive tasks.

Plus, goals are fun. Without a meaningful goal to shoot for, work is just *work*.

No one likes work.

4. A true sense of purpose.

Everyone likes to feel a part of something bigger. Everyone loves to feel that sense of teamwork and esprit de corps that turns a group of individuals into a real team.

The best missions involve making a real impact on the lives of the customers you serve. Let employees know what you want to achieve for your business, for your customers, and even your community. And if you can, let them create a few missions of their own.

Feeling a true purpose starts with knowing what to care about and, more importantly, why to care.

5. Opportunities to provide significant input.

Engaged employees have ideas; take away opportunities for them to make suggestions, or instantly disregard their ideas without consideration, and they immediately disengage.

That's why exceptional bosses make it incredibly easy for employees to offer suggestions. They ask leading questions. They probe gently. They help employees feel comfortable proposing new ways to get things done. When an idea isn't feasible, they always take the time to explain why.

Great bosses know that employees who make suggestions care about the company, so they ensure those employees know their input is valued -- and appreciated.

6. A real sense of connection.

Every employee works for a paycheck (otherwise they would do volunteer work), but every employee wants to work for more than a paycheck: They want to work with and for people they respect and admire--and with and for people who respect and admire them.

That's why a kind word, a quick discussion about family, an informal conversation to ask if an employee needs any help -- those moments are much more important than group meetings or formal evaluations.

A true sense of connection is personal. That's why exceptional bosses show they see and appreciate the person, not just the worker.

7. Reliable consistency.

Most people don't mind a boss who is strict, demanding, and quick to offer (not always positive) feedback, as long as he or she treats every employee fairly.

(Great bosses treat each employee *differently* but they also treat every employee *fairly*. There's a big difference.)

Exceptional bosses know the key to showing employees they are consistent and fair is communication: The more employees understand why a decision was made, the less likely they are to assume unfair treatment or favoritism.

8. Private criticism.

No employee is perfect. Every employee needs constructive feedback. Every employee deserves constructive feedback. Good bosses give that feedback.

Great bosses always do it in private.

9. Public praise.

Every employee -- even a relatively poor performer -- does *something* well. Every employee deserves praise and appreciation. It's easy to recognize some of your best employees because they're consistently doing awesome things. (Maybe consistent recognition is a reason they're your best employees? Something to think about.)

You might have to work hard to find reasons to recognize an employee who simply meets standards, but that's okay: A few words of recognition--especially *public* recognition--may be the nudge an average performer needs to start becoming a great performer.

10. A chance for a meaningful future.

Every job should have the potential to lead to greater things. Exceptional bosses take the time to develop employees for the job they someday hope to land, even if that job is with another company.

How can you know what an employee hopes to do someday? Ask.

Employees will only care about your business after you first show you care about them. One of the best ways is to show that while you certainly have hopes for your company's future, you also have hopes for your employees' futures.

Now it's your turn: What exceptional thing has a truly extraordinary boss done for you?

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