

# Rose Consulting Group Client Newsletter

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Robyn W. Porterfield & Robert G. Rose

**Who is the best boss you ever had?**

**Chances are you will recognize the person described last month by our newsletter readers: that very imperfect person who was the best boss you ever had.**

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## BACKGROUND

In February of 2004 we asked our newsletter clients about the best boss they ever had, positive, negative and why he or she was the best boss.

## WHAT WE KNEW WE WOULD NOT FIND

The "Perfect Boss" found in management textbooks—who never really existed.

We have all read about ideal bosses, those men and women who know how to manage in one minute, make ideal decisions, are eternally patient, always adjust their management style to the needs of the subordinate and manage to perfectly balance micromanagement with neglect. They never lose their tempers, always empower and—oh by the way—don't exist.

## WHAT WE DID FIND

The real "Best Boss" – warts and all.

The best bosses were far from perfect

Our respondents did not pretend that they worked for a perfect person. Instead they shared that at times their bosses were too indirect when handling conflict, too interested in consensus over speed, too prone to do work themselves instead of delegating, and so on. As in previous surveys the interesting finding was not only the breadth of shortcomings but also the shortcomings that were conspicuous by their absence. In this and previous surveys, formal and informal we have heard "temperamental"; but, we have

never heard "bored." We have heard "impatient"; we have never heard "lazy." We have done this type of survey through the years so the results were not surprising to us – but they were still refreshing.

## THE BEST BOSSES SOUNDED VERY MUCH ALIKE

If the shortcomings of the best boss varied widely, the strengths had an uncanny similarity – almost as if the same person were being described again and again.

The best boss was someone who, to use some direct quotes:

- Was a cheerleader.
- Was a good listener.
- Was honest with me.
- Wanted my career to advance.
- Accepted responsibility.
- Took me to meet clients.
- Communicated a vision.
- Always answered my questions.
- Included me.
- Valued my input.
- Helped me to learn.
- Cared about me.
- Was a boss I tried please.

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Would you like people who thought you were a good boss and wanted to please you?

## WHO ARE YOU LIKE?

Are you the businesslike person who “manages by bestseller” and who stays in your office thinking about crafting intricate strategy? Are you the stern taskmaster who makes your will known and expects your people to, ala Captain Picard of the Enterprise, “make it so”? If so, you may be many things, maybe even successful, but chances are that you are no one’s “best boss ever.”

On the other hand if you have myriad shortcomings and don’t know if you match any of the textbook virtues, don’t despair. If you are there to listen and answer questions, help your employees learn, improve and let them know you are interested in doing things that help their careers...well, while it may be a surprise, you may be someone’s best boss. So you may under-delegate, get too involved with detail, communicate poorly in some areas, etc. etc. If you take a few minutes a week thinking about what you can do to further a subordinate’s career, a lot of those shortcomings are going to be overlooked.

One boss complimented one of his staff by gathering people around his desk and leading a round of applause. No big deal, right? Wrong.

Early in her career, one of the authors (Robyn) actually had a boss who sat down at her desk and asked her, “now that I’ve got you to help me with my career, what can I do to help yours—let’s talk.” Unheard of, right? No, but uncommon.

Thirty years ago, the other author (Bob) sat in a tiny office doing he remembers not, when one of the partners walked in and sat down. He asked young Bob how he was doing, complimented a painting on the wall, said he had a similar painting, and left after about 25 seconds of such banal chit-chat. The point of the story? Bob remembers it vividly enough after thirty years to tell you about it. Was he perfect? No. But time and again we find that it’s not only the grand gestures, but also the “little stuff” that “doesn’t matter” that stands out in people’s minds – and hearts.

If it hasn’t already become clear, there are huge benefits inherent in being a good boss. We can take just few behaviors off our list to illustrate. Employees who work for a good boss will work harder, which makes the boss look good. As consultants who deal with successful and unsuccessful leaders every day, we have yet to hear, “All her people thought she was a great boss but she failed”. If you are willing to listen, really listen to others you benefit from their ideas, opinions and solutions. Okay, so they may not know all the intricacies of the problem or situation – but that also means they are not constrained by those details and can be more creative in their problem-solving. By

valuing the opinions of those around you, your idea pool expands that much more.

Admitting you’re not perfect and owning up to your mistakes actually makes life easier by reducing the stress that comes with perfection. And let’s not forget that when you build an atmosphere of trust, you increase communication and pre-emptive problem-solving. People are much more likely to share news with you, both good and bad. And who among us hasn’t been sideswiped by bad news?

We could list 100 other ways being a better boss will make your life easier including that being the best boss you can be is the RIGHT thing to do.

Do you see yourself in this article? If you do, great! But if you’re not the boss you’d like to be, watch for our next newsletter in which we focus on how to become that “good boss” that people still talk about years later.

The authors can be reached at:

**Robyn W. Porterfield, PhD**  
rporterfield@roseconsultinggroup.com

**Robert G. Rose, PhD**  
rose@roseconsultinggroup.com

Or visit our website at:  
[www.roseconsultinggroup.com](http://www.roseconsultinggroup.com)

