The True Costs of a Bad Boss

75% of U.S. workers say their boss is the worst part of their job

Bad bosses cost the world economy an estimated $360 billion in productivity

Workers with bad managers are 60% more likely to suffer heart trauma
Apparently, a plague of bad bosses is running rampant in the United States, so much so that, according to an Inc. study, 75% of American workers say their boss is the worst and most stressful part of their jobs. How bad are they? Bad enough for 65% of respondents to say they’d rather have a new boss over a pay raise.

When workers were asked how they feel about their bosses, it’s easy to see the reasoning behind their willingness to sacrifice cash in favor of giving their boss the axe. In fact, WorldWideLearn reports that more than 40% of U.S. workers believe their boss does not work very hard, while almost 20% feel their boss has little or no integrity. But perhaps the most taxing find in the study is the fact that more than 30% of respondents feel uninspired and unappreciated, a trickle-down effect of poor leadership.

**Characteristics of a Bad Boss**

By definition, bosses and managers should lead, but it seems like in many cases, they lead their team down a path of dissatisfaction, suspicion and deprecation. From the outside looking in, it may be tough to distinguish a good boss from a poor one, but with some experience under their helm, it’s fairly easy to single out the traits that make a bad boss.

In an attempt to find out what makes a manager a good one, WorkSimple.com polled workers and asked what the “worst bossy traits” are. The most popular response, given by over 40% of the respondents, was public belittling. If public belittling is an issue for nearly half of American workers, it’s easy to see why their bosses get a bad reputation. Airing grievances in public is never a good thing, and doing it in front of an office full of colleagues only exacerbates the problem. This falls into the category of disrespect, along with WorkSimple’s third and fourth most popular responses, condescension (32%) and humiliation (24%), respectively.

The two remaining “worst bossy traits” from WorkSimple’s top five lie under the umbrella of trust, albeit from two opposing sides of the spectrum. The second worst trait is lying (34%), symbolizing workers’ lack of trust in their bosses, and the fifth is micromanaging, which shows the bosses’ lack of trust in their workers. Workers need to trust in their leaders’ visions in order to perform to the best of their abilities, and bosses need to trust that their workers are capable performers that’ll get the job done. Trust is a two-way street, and without it, organizations’ quality of work and production falters.

While the aforementioned characteristics are more personal detriments to the office, Inc.’s study sought to find major operational flaws held by bad bosses. The top five responses were:
1. Failure to inspire
2. Accepting mediocrity
3. Lacking clear vision and direction
4. Inability to collaborate and be a team player
5. Failing to “walk the talk”

These are all characteristics of a poor leader. A leader is part of the team, not above it, and a team of mediocrity reflects on its leader’s abilities (or lack thereof). Other than leading by example, most employees want to believe in their company and its management team, but when those at the helm do little to inspire that belief, the company is bound to suffer the consequences.

The Effects of Poor Management on the Office

The easiest consequence of bad management to spot is its toll on productivity. Retaliatory slowdowns are bound to take place, as is an overall lack of motivation, which will further deplete production. This is evident in Inc.’s study, which asked workers how they respond to bad managers:

1. 33% don’t put in maximum effort
2. 30% slow down or purposefully make errors
3. 29% take sick days despite not being ill
4. 27% hide from their boss
5. 25% took more or longer breaks

Each of these rates are at least three-times the rates of respondents with “non-abusive” bosses, which is a testament to how detrimental poor management is on both workers’ morale and their quality of work. And the fact that workers chose to go these routes instead of bringing to light their concerns means these acts occur on a daily basis without the boss knowing or getting a chance to rectify them.

Digging deeper into the consequences, Keas.com, a platform that seeks to encourage wellness at the office, asked workers what actions they took in response to an “unreasonable boss.” While 59% of respondents said they stayed, 27% quit as soon as a new job was lined up, while another 11% quit immediately without a new job.

As recent studies found that losing workers and hiring replacements can cost an organization thousands of dollars, these findings should highlight the importance of keeping workers happy and keeping them on the job.

Bad Bosses’ Effects on Health
While there’s no doubt that bad bosses take a toll on the office, their effects on the personal health of their workers are fairly shocking. Keas.com found that 77% of employees experience physical symptoms of stress from bad bosses. According to WebMD, these symptoms can include rapid heartbeat, chest pains, insomnia and headaches, among many others. The study also found that 73% of workers experience psychological symptoms, which can include moodiness, feeling a loss of control, forgetfulness and an inability to relax.

These symptoms of stress can lead to many other health issues, especially heart problems. Keas found that workers who had inconsiderate or uncommunicative managers were 60% more likely to suffer heart trauma, while Inc. found that workers who have poor relationships with their bosses are 30% more likely to suffer coronary heart disease. To put these figures in perspective, Keas found that employees whose managers showed positive leadership skills were roughly 40% less likely to suffer heart-related emergencies.

Keas sought to put a monetary value to these findings, and they calculated that stressed employees cost an additional 46%, or $600 more, per person than their counterparts due to healthcare costs. Taking it further, the World Health Organization estimates that, as a result of stress, the world economy loses $360 billion every year in insurance costs and productivity. So if the employees’ poor production or debilitating health isn’t convincing enough for a manager to change his or her ways, perhaps the fact that they’re hemorrhaging cash is.

Conclusion

No one should have to work in an environment that demoralizes them and depletes their health, but unfortunately, many do. Pepperdine University found that the two most important components in an employee-boss relationship are trust and respect, and for both management and employees, working to improve upon these aspects can go a long way to repairing an otherwise damaged relationship.

Considering that bosses and workers devote a large amount of time to their jobs, the least we all can do is work to make everyone’s experience a bit more rewarding.

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