



Dear Friend,

## Channel Surfing

Picture the scene. It was this winter, and I was on yet another business trip. Honestly, I don't even remember what city it was. (Yes, the travel was that constant at one point this winter!)

Anyway, after airports and flights and shuttles and luggage, I tumbled into my hotel room well after 10:00 pm, and I instinctively flipped on the television for background noise while I wound down a bit and partially unpacked for the next morning's meeting. In channel surfing, I found myself watching the tail end of a show called, *The Good Wife*. It turned out to be part legal drama, part back-of-a-campaign politics, and a lot of interpersonal intrigue -- all the stuff that I usually don't watch at home because my hubby complains that I spend more time fussing with the TV than just watching the program. What can I say?

Well, *The Good Wife* caught my attention that night, and it left me thinking about the people we want in our lives. Good spouses...good children...good neighbors...good bosses. Yeah, as our team's been talking with many of you lately, we've heard a lot about the last item on that list. So, I decided to put a pin in that topic.

What does it take to be a good boss? Do you recognize the good-boss qualities in yourself, in the people who report to you, or in the person under whose direction you work? Does being a good boss all rest with the person in the boss' seat, or is there something that every staff member can do to encourage a good-boss environment? Let's spend some time peeling back the onion on this one.

In this issue of *EA Insights*, we'll think a bit about what it means to be a good boss. Then, next month, we'll share some ideas about supporting your boss or those around you to become even better. It's our hope that this discussion will help to make you and your workplace more productive.

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
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## The Good Boss: How to Be (or Recognize) One

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I don't think I know anyone who can honestly say that he or she doesn't want to be a success. Do you?

What's interesting, though, is that usually many of us talk about wanting to achieve success, but we often spend little, if any, time really figuring out how success in a role looks and how we match up against that externally or self-imposed standard.

To help address that disconnect, as we support executives, managers, or team leaders through Executive Advantage, we build standard-setting and self-examination into each process. Although it may look different from client-to-client, early on in each coaching engagement or workshop, we pause for folks to step back and list what makes a good leader...a good boss. What qualities do people value and respect in superiors, peers, or other leaders?

In fact, why don't you take a moment now, and create your own list of what makes a good boss? When you're finished, you'll probably find that those admired traits fit into some or all of these broad categories.

### Productivity

Good bosses are productive. They consistently achieve results. Those results clearly benefit the organization that employs them. However, fostering an environment of productivity also should have a significant and positive impact on the staff surrounding them -- highlighting their efforts, minimizing external scrutiny, and affording greater organizational and job stability.

Two points are important about the productivity trait, however. First, good bosses are productive in a profitable way. It's one thing to meet or exceed product or service expectations. It's another thing to do so by going over budget, unreasonably tying up human and other resources, and stressing everyone in the process. In the latter case, it's questionable whether the end justifies the means and whether the operation can survive long-term functioning in such a manner. So, good bosses are able to couple productivity with profitable behavior.

Second, good bosses understand that their productivity -- their success, if you will -- is measured by the results they achieve through others. They don't

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### "Quotes"

*"I had high expectations for myself, and the team did also."*  
~Boss Bailey

*"Leadership and communication go hand in hand."*  
~Mayor Baptiste

*"The test of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there."*  
~James Buchanan

*"It is reassuring for people to feel they have a boss, someone who knows the answers and has charted the course."*  
~George Cukor

*"To be a good boss, you have to prepare yourself to be accountable for the things you do and say; that's a big responsibility."*  
~Rodney Davis

*"The productivity of work is not the responsibility of the worker but of the manager."*  
~Peter Drucker

*"Caring for staff is not just a matter of giving them superannuation.... You have to look after health and safety too. If you have healthy, happy, well-balanced staff then you're going to get better productivity."*  
~Eric Harrison

*"Communication leads to buy-in which fosters ownership and accountability. Accountability gives you return on your investment."*  
~Edith Hunter

micromanage. They don't try to carry the whole burden alone. They delegate effectively. They observe people and do their best to match skill and interest to task. They define roles; set reasonable expectations; monitor progress; and assist and coach along the way, as needed. In sum, they seek to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to them in ways that engage and encourage every member of the team.

### **Communication**

Good bosses communicate well. Now, that doesn't mean that they must be polished and prepared to speak before the masses. Instead, they have learned to communicate successfully in their specific environments. They relate effectively and often with staff, peers, and those to whom they report because they recognize that the information flow -- up, down, and across -- is essential to the work to be done.

Good bosses also are observant, getting to know people's patterns, body language, and communication styles and then tailoring their interactions appropriately. Good bosses listen as much as, if not more than, they talk. Although they may come to an interaction with a desired outcome, they also come with an open mind that allows for flexibility and a healthy give-and-take in reaching a reasonable result.

Even when a situation involves the sharing of bad news, good bosses are able to clearly present the circumstances and/or rationale in a way that allows people to understand the situation and/or decision and to take the necessary follow-up action, even if they're not thrilled with the direction or the outcome.

### **Relationships**

Much of what's behind the good-boss traits set out above (and, I'm sure, the ones on your list) is rooted in the ability to build and nurture relationships. Good bosses are people who show people that they care. They recognize and treat people on the team as more than pawns to be moved from spot-to-spot and task-to-task. Good bosses get to know who team members are, what they're good at doing (and what they're not good at doing), and what they care about...essentially, what makes them tick.

Building relationships is more than just keeping an index card with key facts about every staff member, though. (That may help you become familiar with people, but it doesn't constitute relationship.) Relationships stem from genuinely caring about the people on the team -- yes, their performance at work, but them as people too. And, by demonstrating such caring, day in and day out, good bosses develop relationships and create an environment of mutual trust.

### **Growth**

One way good bosses relay caring is by encouraging growth. People work diligently for and rally behind leaders whom they know desire, and are helping, to make them stronger. So, good bosses engage in ongoing dialogue with staff about where they see themselves and opportunities for growth. And, good bosses encourage and orchestrate those opportunities when and where possible, even if it means assisting a staff member to pursue that growth elsewhere within or outside of the organization.

The growth characteristic in good bosses doesn't just apply to staff members, however. These aren't folks who think that, just because they've reached a certain position or level, there's nothing else to be learned. Rather, good bosses are constantly seeking self-improvement -- for what that growth means for their organizations and teams but also for what that growth means for them as individuals. They model a hunger for continuous professional and personal development as well as encourage it among those for whom they are responsible.

### **Leadership**



In many respects, good bosses are people who have learned the true essence of leadership.

They are responsible, having learned first to lead themselves effectively and consistently before seeking or accepting the role of leading others. They are good followers, understanding that the respect and effort they afford those who lead them provides a model of respect and effort for those whom they lead. They are accountable, taking

seriously the trust placed in them by the organization and by the team, and doing their best to steward that trust well. They are confident, acknowledging the gifts and talents they have been given and, in an assured manner, using those strengths to enhance the organization and its people. They are authentic, not shying away from letting people know the real them -- as appropriate, laughing, crying, getting angry, being concerned...being a real person and not a cardboard cutout or an aloof persona. They are thermostats, setting the environment in their teams (and sometimes beyond) rather than thermometers, simply reflecting the temperature of what's happening around them.

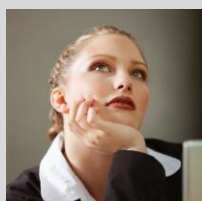
Good bosses are good leaders. So, where do you stand? Where do the bosses who report to you stand? Where does your boss stand? How does the presence or absence of good-boss traits impact your success and that of your organization? How do you capitalize on what you have now for the future?

Join us next month, as we examine *The Good Boss: How to Support (or Encourage) One*.

## **Talk Back...**

What does "thriving" look like for your business or career?

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*"The speed of the boss is the speed of the team."*

~Lee Iacocca

*"Talent is more visible now across various functional silos, so your boss may know where the opportunities for advancement are -- not just in his or her area but in others areas as well."*

~Jim Kochanski

*"Leadership is more if not much more influence, rather than position."*

~John Maxwell

*"Communication is the real work of leadership."*

~Nitin Nohria

*"Our client-focused culture will remain the same.... They count on us for ideas, solutions and creative approaches to their...challenges."*

*"We believe supporting our employees' growth and professional development is critical to our clients' success."*

~Tim Oliver

*"He just does a great job of communicating with us and that's all you can ask for. You get a good relationship with someone like that and the relationship is really what it's all about."*

~Andy Pettitte

*"It's ironic to me, ... that as a boss, all of our leverage comes from our people, yet we very seldom focus on where those people are at, what their needs are and what it would take for them to excel in their performance."*

~Bob Rosner

*"Without Trust, Communication and Honesty in any relationship - There is nothing to build upon...."*

~Paulette Sedgwick

*"He never tried to be the boss, which is the sign of a good leader.... He knew he had good people under him, and he would just let us do that."*

~Brian Taylor

## **About Executive Advantage**

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us **online** or at **(301) 280-5950**.

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