

7

THINGS GREAT BOSSES SHOULD NEVER ASK EMPLOYEES TO DO

As a boss, you have some power...actually quite a lot of power. It can be tempting to throw your weight around on occasions, (I know I have) but that authority should have limits, so with that in mind and the 'ghost' of David Brent always present:-

1. Never pressure (however "subtly") employees to attend social events.



Any time your employees are with people they work with, it's like they're at work. And those situations aren't Vegas; whatever happens there comes back to work to haunt them. Embarrassing behaviour aside, some people just don't want to socialize outside of work. And that's their choice--unless you do something that can make them feel like they should attend. Then it no longer feels like they have a choice and what you intended as a positive get-together becomes anything but. And keep in mind that "pressure" can be as simple as saying, "Hey, Maggie, I really hope you can come to the Christmas party. We would love to see you there." While you may simply be letting Maggie know how much you enjoy her company, if she doesn't want to attend, what she will hear is, "Maggie, if you're not at the party I will be very disappointed in you."

If you really want to hold outside social events, pick themes that work for your employees. Have Santa attend a kids' Christmas party. Have a picnic at a theme park. Take anyone who wants to go to a ballgame. Do your best to pick one or two themes that cover the majority of your employees' interests and then see what happens. Never try to force togetherness or camaraderie. It doesn't work.

2. Never pressure employees to donate to a charity.

The United Way was the charity of choice at a previous employer. Donations were tracked because the stated company goal was 100 percent participation.

Pressure enough? It got worse; every supervisor reported results from their direct reports to the head of the fundraising effort, who happened to be the plant manager. The United Way is a great charity and worthy of support. But don't, even implicitly, pressure employees to donate to a charity.

Sure, make it easy. Match their contributions if you like. But make donating voluntary, and never leave the impression that results are monitored on an individual basis. (And don't do the "support my kid's fundraiser" thing either. That's tacky.) What employees do with their money is their business, not yours. Make sure they are allowed to feel that way.



3. Never make employees go without food at meal times.

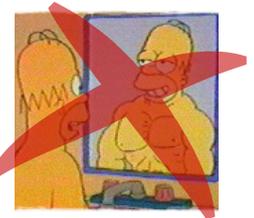
Say you go to a wedding that starts at 5 p.m. If there's a reception you expect a meal to be served instead of just hors d'oeuvres, right? So don't invite employees out for after-work drinks at 6.30 p.m. That's a company dinner, not company drinks. The same is true of lunchtime meetings. If you plan a working lunch, provide food. Some employees go out to eat and if you don't, they're stuck. Plus others might bring food you would, um, prefer not to smell the rest of the afternoon. And always err on the side of caution. If you order pizza for a group and you run out, some employees won't remember they had two great slices; they'll only remember that they wanted a third, and that you were too "cheap" to provide it.



4. Never ask employees to evaluate themselves.

Employees who do a great job always question why they need to evaluate themselves. Shouldn't you already know they do a great job? And the employees who do a poor job rarely rate themselves as poor and that turns what could have been a constructive feedback session into an argument.

Self-evaluations may sound empowering or inclusive but are almost always a waste of time. (And can lead to employees thinking dark thoughts) If you want feedback from an employee, ask her what more you can do to help develop her skills or career.



5. Never ask employees to evaluate their peers.

I've done peer evaluations. They suck. "Peer" means "work together." Who wants to criticize people they have to work with afterward? Plus you can claim evaluations are confidential all you want, but people figure out who said what about whom.

You should know every employee's performance inside and out. If you don't, don't use his or her peers as a crutch. Dig in, pay attention, and truly know the people you claim to lead.



6. Never ask employees to do things you don't do.

Sure, maybe there are things you would do... but would is irrelevant. Actions—especially where leadership is concerned—are everything.

Great leaders lead by example. They help out on the crappiest jobs. They stay later. They come in earlier. Not every time, but definitely some of the time.

Employees will never care as much as you do—to expect otherwise is unrealistic—but they will care a lot more when they know you can be counted on to do whatever needs to get done, regardless of role or position or perceived status.



7. Never ask employees to reveal personal information for "team building."

I once took part in a transformational leadership day offsite.

First, we were told to make small boxes out of cardboard.

(Why do off-sites always seem to involve arts and crafts? And why are so many sites such a waste of time?) Then we were told to cut pictures out of magazines that represented the "outer" us, the part we show to the world.

Then we were told to write down things no one knew about us on slips of paper, put them inside our boxes (get it?), and reveal our slips to the group when it was our turn.



I was OK with putting pictures on the outside of my poorly constructed box even though my lack of scissor skills was embarrassing.

I didn't want to create "reveal" strips, though, and said so.

"Why not?" the facilitator asked.

"Because it's private," I said.

"That's the point!" he said. "The goal is to reveal things people don't know about you."

"They don't know those things about me because I don't want them to know those things about me," I said.

"But think about how much better you will be able to work together when you truly know each other as individuals," he said.

"Sometimes I think it's possible to know too much," I said. "If Joe likes to dress up as a Star Wars character in his spare time that's cool, but I'd really rather not know."

I didn't end up participating, a potentially career-limiting move that turned out fine when upper management's focus soon shifted from "transformational leadership" to "back to basics." (And I was instantly back in vogue.)

You don't need to know your employees' innermost thoughts and feelings. Even if you think you do, you have no right to their thoughts and feelings.

You do have a right to expect acceptable performance.

Talk about performance, and leave all the deep dark secrets where they belong.

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