

# ARE BOSSES LEADERS?



## IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS TO DRIVE BUSINESS FORWARD

By ANG WEINA  
editor@leaderonomics.com

**H**I boss... Yes boss..." You will so often hear such salutations in the office. More interestingly, you would also hear them in the local *mamak* shop or *kopitiam* when you place your order of your favourite *roti canal* or *kopi*.

After a time, we might begin to wonder what, exactly, the word "boss"

means, if it is so loosely used. Who is a boss? The Cambridge Dictionary describes a boss as the person who is in charge of an organisation and who tells others what to do. But is a boss necessarily a leader?

A list of the 10 differences between a boss and a leader, by BuzzFeed's Emmilia Hastings, still strikes me as true. Don't be surprised at how familiar these traits may seem, as most will have come across such characters before...

### ▶ BOSS VS LEADER

- BOSSES BOSS, LEADERS LEAD**  
A boss tells people what to do in a domineering manner, while a leader helps you do it.
- BOSSES LOOK DOWN ON PEOPLE, LEADERS LOOK STRAIGHT AT THEM**  
Leaders succeed by using eye contact and taking the time to listen to co-workers. Bosses often look down on people, dismissive of what they need and/or what they ask for.
- BOSSES SAY 'I', LEADERS SAY 'WE'**  
With leaders, you're a team. They give credit where credit is due. Bosses tend to take more credit than they give.
- BOSSES AND LEADERS AFFECT THEIR WORK PLACE DIFFERENTLY**  
Bosses occasionally stimulate fear in the work environment, while leaders generate enthusiasm.
- BOSSES TELL, LEADERS SHOW**  
Leaders provide a healthy learning environment, encouraging teaching and learning. Bosses tell their employees what to do and don't usually explain how to do it.
- LEADERS ARE LISTENERS**  
The best kinds of leaders listen to other people. They recognise knowledge and wisdom are gained by listening. The best leaders possess the ability to understand what is not said, witnessed, or heard, and come through with promises.
- BOSSES COMMAND, LEADERS ASK**  
Leaders show respect toward their colleagues and ask for them to carry out tasks. Bosses frequently command their workers and are dismissive of anything they have to say.
- BOSSES RELY ON AUTHORITY**  
Bosses depend on being the head of their field. Without power, they have nothing to fall back on. Leaders, on the other hand, rely on their goodwill and confidence. By showing kindness and consideration, they gain support from their colleagues.
- LEADERS SHOW RESPONSIBILITY**  
Leaders take blame for things when they mess up. Bosses commonly blame others for issues and dilemmas in the work place.
- LEADERS ARE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS**  
Leaders are more likely to be trusted and respected if they're effective communicators. Facial expressions, hand motions, body posture and eye movement all affect the way a person comes across. Most people pay more attention to emotion and actions rather than words being said.



### GENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

While the replies of "yes boss" continue to be heard, the fact of the matter is we want a leader, not a boss. More importantly, we want a leader who can fit into today's global organisation to navigate a "new world of work" – one that requires a dramatic change in strategies for leadership, talent and human resources (HR).

But firstly, what kind of leadership do we have?

The baby boomers and Gen-X had a completely different lifestyle and perspective in virtues, shaped by the economy, cultural values and technology of the time. It was a culture of keeping your nose to the grind and following the pecking order. Can Gen-Y, who has grown up in a more technologically advanced and entitled environment with its YOLO (you only live once) values, adapt to the same leadership style?

It is not surprising that organisations around the world are struggling to strengthen their leadership pipelines, especially in their ability to develop millennial leaders. It will be even more vital for the upcoming leader to be able to connect across these generations of employees to bring out the best in them. The current trend of succession planning is more often a sporadic reaction, confining development to a selected few employees, failing to make long term investments in leadership, and neglecting to build robust leadership pipelines.

The irony is that while organisations may recognise the need for successors, they do not always implement effective leadership development.

According to the *Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2015: Leading in the new world of work* report, many organisations view leadership development as a short term training programme or series of episodic events that are funded one year, but may not be budgeted for in the next. They treat development as a luxury, but neglect the fact that high performing companies actually spend 1.5-to-two times more on leadership training in good and bad times, and reap results that are triple or quadruple the levels of their competitors.

If developing leadership is not treated as an ongoing strategic initiative by HR and the business, the leadership pipeline will be weak. This has the potential of negatively impacting the business as a whole in the long term.

Even at the top of the corporate pyramid, some C-suite executives may be neglected from receiving any developments at all. Is development only for the few and not for the many?

### TAKING THE FIRST STEP

We need a commitment from the top. The CEO must own and commit to a continuous investment in leadership development. Early planning for succession is also vital to ensure a strong foundation is built before the next chapter of the business can be effectively furthered.

Next, we ask ourselves: what is the leadership for? What are your top business priorities? Build a simple capability framework for selection, assessment, development and succession that defines the leadership you currently need, but which can

also adapt and develop for the future.

However, leadership is not only confined to the top management. Strategic leaders of the future lie with the mid-level and first-level leaders. Develop inclusive leaders at all levels. An upcoming leader will have to manage employees who are remnants of baby boomers, or the majority of Gen-Y and the budding Gen-Z.

A leadership style which was regarded as successful in the past may not ultimately be the style to be adopted by the successor to fit into this new world. To keep up with the constant changes in the business landscape, a focus on leadership at all levels, coupled with consistent yearly spending in this area, is key to building sustainable performance and engaging employees in the new world of work.

And hence the final question: Are there any takers for the role of a leader? Will the chosen one be the choice of the employees, or the choice of the upper management? A dilemma at times, but it is true that selecting the right people can be difficult, as Jeffrey Cohn and Jay Moran stated in their bestseller, *Why are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders?*

How do we close the gap between theory and results in selecting leaders?

The X factor in a leader is one of the few things in life which is hard to define. Ultimately, a good leader is often a combination of different characteristics; the most typical being a people person, principled, and a visionary, with the drive to make things happen.

■ Ang Weina is an executive director at Deloitte Malaysia. She is also the national practice leader for Deloitte Malaysia's Global Employer Services. The above views are her own. To connect with her, send an email to editor@leaderonomics.com