

Fire your boss

by Gianni Anchois

What to do when your managers are incompetent and do not listen to what you say?

Yesterday I helped my daughter with her homework. The assignment was to analyse and comment on the best theories for motivating and rewarding employees, so naturally it implied looking at the work of some globally recognised authorities in such field like Maslow, Taylor, Mayo and Heltzberg.

A QUESTION OF MOTIVATION

I've written about motivation before, because it's a topic I'm quite passionate about, so it was refreshing to find quite a lot of neatly articulated theoretical rationale to support my hands-on, experience-based findings.

My personal take is that motivation is not something that external factors can provide per se. Certainly setting up the right environment is important, and a wise mix of financial and non-financial elements are

fundamental. But ultimately, beyond autonomy, responsibility and purpose, it's down to each one of us to really identify what triggers our motivation to perform and the will to constantly improve ourselves.

Too often, however, circumstances play against such a clear cut endeavour, and we end up working with bosses that are unprepared to manage people, unwilling to put in the work to learn how to manage people or plainly shallow human beings opportunistically going through the motions of managing people.

FIRE YOUR BOSS

What to do when your managers are incompetent and do not listen to what you say? Put them out of their misery! No, of course I don't mean suppressing them!

What I mean is, after you have tried everything you can to help and make them understand, just ditch them. Fire them. Move to a different team, or quit if the management disease has spread too far.

I believe that for a company to have poor management and leadership is bad enough in normal times. With the current economic situation, however, it's plainly criminal. And I'm not talking about executive vice-presidents only. Actually, in my experience, it is where things are supposed to get done – i.e. at middle management level – that the lack of skills and attitude really makes the most damage.

So what are the typical macro-signs of a poor manager?

6 SIGNS OF BAD MANAGEMENT

1. Bad communications

Meetings are badly prepared. No material is shared or circulated before-hand (often not even after the meeting). Meeting notes are not taken and actions are neither captured nor tracked. Emails queries do not get replied to. Higher management communications and directions are not timely sent through the organisation.

2. Fuzzy roles and responsibilities

You can never know whether a specific task is really part of your duties or not. You know you should say "no" more often but you cannot figure out when. The same

job or task is assigned to a number of the team members, who are then played against each other. You are given performance metrics that either do not matter, are unachievable or outside of your direct influence.

3. *No delegation or participation*

Things get discussed without your knowledge or involvement, and decisions are made behind your back. Everything is centralised in the hands of the boss, who assigns tasks and then micro-manages the progress. Employee's opinion is never asked or actively discouraged. Non-canonical point of views are silenced. The team grows frustrated as a result of lack of transparency, and negative comments only result in additional frustration among members.

4. *Lots of surprises*

Surprises in business always cause problems, and are a very clear sign of bad management. Anticipating a problem usually means you can fix it or at least limit the damage. Being surprised by one – as in “no telling signs until the very last second” – always end up in disaster. When you get a lot of surprises, even positive ones like for example the signing of an unexpected contract at the very end of the month, the cause is always poor management and incompetence.

5. *Never ending projects*

Problems are never really solved. Processes are never really fixed. You keep having to fix the same core issues all year long (aka the “fire-fighting” syndrome most of us know very well). Planning activities last for months and seem to never end. Bad managers don't realise that planning is a stage. Do it, spend the right amount of time on building your plan, then go and execute. Poor managers never seem to be able to get out of the planning stage and into execution.

6. *No skills or career development*

Team members do not get any support or assistance to develop new skills that would allow their career to

develop. Improving one's knowledge and skills becomes a personal effort, often against all odds. If an employee performs well in a certain role or responsibilities, chance are she will never be moved to a different position.

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I'm sure that some of you will have been nodding their heads reading through my post so far. It's an unfortunate reality of working as an employee that sooner or later you will have to deal with someone showing some of these behaviours, and you'll get to the point where you need to make a decision.

My recommendation? Do yourself a favour: fire your boss.

Gianni Anchois is a writer, blogger and technology enthusiast, with a background in electronics engineering, computer science and marketing. He has worked at Olivetti, Italia Online, Yahoo! and Hewlett-Packard, holding international responsibilities across IT services, business management, e-commerce, sales and marketing.

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