

IF IT WERE EASY EVERYONE WOULD BE A GREAT SUPERVISOR BUDDY VS. BULLY

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We tend to assess ourselves based on our good intentions and assess others based on their behaviors. Hit the pause button on that and consider how that impacts the perceptions of your direct reports about you and your style as a coach and supervisor.

We may inadvertently be getting in our own way of being a highly effective coach. Is your behavior an obstacle for your people? While we may have the best intentions of being friendly enough with our direct reports to earn their trust, we still want to be firm enough to earn their respect. This proves to be a particularly challenging dilemma if you previously were one of their peers. We have created a scale that reflects the extremes people in supervisory positions fall into: the extremes of Buddy and Bully.



As you move up to the role of supervisor or coach it becomes difficult to strike the right balance between being a Buddy or a Bully in order to achieve the results that you are looking for. This balance is critical to being an effective supervisor or coach. Remember that your direct reports are people – they may have been your peers and friends. With this new position comes a new relationship and a new mindset in order to be effective. You may have a strong desire to be liked based on your behavioral profile. You may have a misconception that if you are a supervisor you must always be tough, controlling and

bossy. So, what's the answer here? Do you want to be a Buddy, someone who comes off as the kind of person who will go to great lengths to be liked, or a Bully, someone risking personal relationships in order to get results? The answer is neither – both are extremes that are ineffective at getting the most out of your people over time and make it impossible for creating a healthy environment where people and results thrive over time.

While Bully certainly sounds like an extreme based on the word alone, how can being a Buddy be an extreme as well? How can something like a Buddy have a negative impact on performance? A Buddy is a supervisor who has a very strong need to be liked by their people. If you were previously one of their peers, you may find yourself missing the casual friendliness of having lunch together, talking about each other's personal lives and maybe even complaining about the unrealistic demands of your boss. The problem is *you* are now the boss.

The challenge of wanting to be a buddy comes from confusing respect with being liked and not being able to separate the two. Buddies find it hard to say no to requests coming from their people. Buddies find it very difficult to tell the direct report the hard truth about their performance or crossing boundaries. They will skirt around the issue, making vague references to the issue, hoping the employee figures it out and makes the change on their own. That approach doesn't help you or the direct report. Minus your honest assessment and direct feedback, you create a void that keeps them guessing as to what to do to improve. Ironically, the most caring behavior a supervisor



can enact is to have the courage and care to offer tough, appropriate, timely feedback that will help a direct report grow. Then when you sit down for the annual performance review you will not find them shocked and totally unprepared for any negative news that you need to give them.

The over-familiarity that you typically create as a Buddy supervisor can turn you into a doormat. Why? Because your behavior has taught your people that there will be little to no repercussions for taking advantage of you. While this certainly will not be the case for every employee, it is a significant potential risk that comes with being a Buddy. Buddy supervisors do not know how to appropriately assert their power for fear that it could ruin relationships.



The other end of the spectrum is the Bully. The Bully has made the determination that to be the boss, one needs to be in complete control. They often assume that there is one “right” way of doing things and that any deviance from their way is a threat to their authority. And much like the Buddy, the Bully does not understand how to properly use their authority. A Bully is overly direct and relentless in pursuing the behaviors they want from their direct reports, abandoning any comradery that they may have previously had with their direct reports. These kinds of supervisors have a tendency to focus on the negative – only telling the direct reports what they are doing wrong without giving them optimal

support in how they can do it right. They provide far too little praise, positive recognition and encouragement.

While a Bully may get *compliance*, they are unable to actually establish a level of commitment from others that would lead to *initiative* and *discretionary* effort. People will do what they are told to do out of fear short term, but they will do little more than what they are required to do and will certainly not be motivated to go above and beyond. Bullies inappropriately use negative consequences and intimidation in some cases to feel superior and in other cases because they didn’t have positive, effective role models for how to be a great supervisor and coach.

The opportunity is to enhance your self-awareness and behavioral flexibility in the pursuit of a healthy balance between these two extremes. As a supervisor, manager or coach you want to establish clear credibility and authority and use both in a way that is beneficial for both the organization and your team. A good supervisor values their direct reports and also becomes valuable to them by acting as a preferred source of information about “the big picture” as well as day to day direction, insight and guidance. Effective managers also earn loyalty by providing appropriate support in any number of circumstances. Bullies demand loyalty and Buddies *hope* to get it by being overly nice.

Finding a healthy balance between these two extremes requires insight, skill development and a particular mindset. We can help. Let’s have a no obligation conversation about your supervisors, managers and leaders. They are the key to employee satisfaction, retention and productivity.

