



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Are You a GREAT Boss?

By Brian Pauley with Chris Edmonds

If someone asked, “Are you a great boss?” how would you respond?

Through a blend of humility and uncertainty of where you actually stand on the greatness continuum, you would probably hesitate to say “Yes.” Most would probably say they are a good boss. Few would admit to being a bad boss. In fact, bad bosses probably don’t strive to be bad—they either don’t realize it, or do realize it and fail to do something about it. Regardless of where you stand, if you desire to improve as a boss, this article is for you!

What does it take to be a great boss? To assist with this topic, I have the pleasure of bringing corporate culture expert Chris Edmonds to *The Stepping Stone* readers. Chris is the author of the book, *Be a GREAT Boss—The Five Secrets to Inspiring Trust and Respect in the Workplace*.

Brian Pauley (BP): Chris, what is your definition of a GREAT boss?

Chris Edmonds (CE): We’ve all had good and bad bosses in our past. Some of us have been lucky enough to have enjoyed one or two GREAT bosses along the way. I define a GREAT boss as a leader who creates a safe, inspiring work environment where team members work together to apply their knowledge and skills to WOW customers, day in and day out. There are two important pieces to being a GREAT boss—consistent high performance by team members and the team, plus a safe, inspiring work environment for every team member.

BP: You mention inspiring work environments. Why do so many work environments fail to inspire?

CE: Most work environments are lifeless and dull. Many work environments are frustrating. Why are so few work environments safe, productive and inspiring? It’s primarily because bosses don’t pay attention to workplace inspiration. If bosses have been taught anything, they’ve been taught to focus on production and results, not on team member enthusiasm, commitment or sanity.

Team members need to understand the context for their work—to understand why their work is important, and who cares if their work is done well. GREAT bosses communicate that frequently—they help team members understand the team’s purpose—its reason for being—values and behaviors, strategies and goals.

BP: If bosses are interested in learning where they stand with their employees, how might they go about doing that?

CE: As Ken Blanchard says, “Feedback is the breakfast of champions.” Great athletes study their every move to see where slight enhancements can help them perform better with greater efficiency and less pain. They watch the film of their performances and learn from past efforts, successes and mistakes.

Leaders need to “watch the film,” too. They need to learn how others—their bosses, peers, team members and customers—perceive them. These key players have opinions about what that leader is doing—what he or she could do more of, less of, or better—and how that leader could serve more effectively.

How can leaders learn from others? They need to ASK—and make it easy for people in their “sphere of influence” to share perceptions. Leaders need a variety of “learning perceptions” channels, like an employee survey, customer survey, informal focus group or one-on-ones.

Leaders need to make it safe for people to give them corrective feedback. Once they get feedback, they need to thank players for offering their insights—and they need to share their plan for refining their behavior, based on that feedback.

Leaders can try out my free online Great Boss Assessment (<http://drtc.me/gba-1>).

BP: In your book, you discuss the GREAT acronym to identify the five key outcomes on which great bosses focus. Tell us what your research has found.



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S. Chris Edmonds is the founder and CEO of The Purposeful Culture Group. Chris provides high-impact keynotes, executive briefings, and executive consulting and coaching. He has authored seven books, his latest being *The Culture Engine*, published by Wiley in September 2014. His blog and podcasts can be found at <http://drivingresultsthroughculture.com>.

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CE: Over 30 years of experience and research have enabled me to identify the five key practices that GREAT bosses consistently use to build trust and respect in their work environment. I call these the five secrets of being a GREAT boss.

Conveniently enough, they are easily remembered—they form the acronym GREAT.

GROWTH—GREAT bosses create avenues for team members to build skills, learn new approaches, and put those skills into action in the workplace.

RELATIONSHIPS—GREAT bosses create and maintain positive relationships with team members, during every interaction. In addition, they demand civil, positive relationships between and among team members.

EXCELLENCE—GREAT bosses set high performance expectations and coach team members to exceed them, every day.

ACCOUNTABILITY—GREAT bosses know that consequence management is the avenue to high-performing, values-aligned teams. They hold themselves and team members accountable for their commitments.

TEAMWORK—GREAT bosses know that cooperative interaction among team members maintains trust and respect more than competitive interaction. They create norms that enable sharing of information, skills and support across their team.

BP: In my opinion, something that separates great from average or even good bosses is their attention to an organization's values. In your opinion, how do GREAT bosses treat organizational values as a part of their work?

CE: GREAT bosses create two sets of expectations for teams and members. Performance expectations are important—they create financial success and allow the enterprise to maintain itself. Values expectations are equally important—they create a work environment based on trust, dignity and respect.

Most bosses do not have experience with values expectations or values accountability. They only know performance expectations and performance

accountability—and, many leaders don't do these well.

GREAT bosses make values behavioral—they define terms like “integrity” and “teamwork” in observable, measurable terms. Valued behaviors are easy to model and easy to see.

Aligned values help create a safe, inspiring work environment where everyone does their best, willingly, every day.

BP: I believe good bosses are effective with delegation and in holding others accountable. But, what do GREAT bosses do differently?

CE: GREAT bosses delegate authority and responsibility to team members who demonstrate high performance and values alignment. They don't delegate to learners—that's unfair! Once learners evolve into values-aligned “do”-ers, they've earned the right to that authority and responsibility.

GREAT bosses must hold themselves to high performance standards and high values standards FIRST. Only when they model both sets of expectations do those bosses earn the right to demand alignment from their team members.

GREAT bosses stay close to the “pulse” of their organization—they pay attention to how the team is operating, not just how it's performing. Accountability isn't a discussion that happens once a month—those discussions happen daily. GREAT bosses listen and learn to understand the demands on their team members and refine plans based on the reality of the moment.

BP: Let's talk about teamwork a little bit. I would consider teamwork an abused word in most corporate cultures. How do GREAT bosses turn teamwork from cliché to high-performance fuel?

CE: Most team members were hired because of past accomplishments and current skills. They may not know how to be effective team members. Cooperative interaction may be something they've never seen in a workplace before!

GREAT bosses help team members demonstrate effective team membership skills, like listening,



problem solving and cooperating. Once those skills are mastered, GREAT bosses help team members demonstrate effective team *leadership* skills, like facilitating, coaching and aligning players and skills.

One thing I've seen many GREAT bosses do to boost teamwork is to refine team member incentives. If team members are purely compensated for individual contribution, teamwork will suffer. If GREAT bosses want teamwork to be a normal way of operating, they shift compensation so at least half of team member incentives are based on the team's success.

You get what you reward. If you want demonstrated cooperative teamwork, you must value and reward it.

BP: Someone reading this article might say, "This is great, but I'm not a boss yet." This is a fair point. But, I'm sure there are things he or she should be doing right now to be prepared for that day. What do you recommend here?

CE: Everyone has influence in a work environment. GREAT bosses love GREAT team members. Individual contributors can act in ways to further GREAT practices, no matter their role in the organization.

One of the most important GREAT team member factors is to keep your promises, to demonstrate a commitment to your commitments. That's integrity at its finest—doing what you say you will do. When team members are able to do that, they can leave at the end of their shift or day with their heads held high.

BP: Last, but not least, I want to talk about your new book, *The Culture Engine*, a must-read for aspiring GREAT bosses. What can those of us with GREAT boss aspirations look forward to in the book?

CE: I'm very excited about *The Culture Engine*, which was published by Wiley in September 2014. The book presents a framework to help leaders create workplace inspiration in their team, department, division or company.

That framework is an organizational constitution—a formal document that outlines the team's purpose (reason for being), values and behaviors, strategies and goals.

I present a step-by-step guide, including worksheets, that will help leaders create their organizational constitution and help their team leaders and members align to it.

Readers can learn more at <http://thecultureengine.com>. ●

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