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Book Review: *Good Boss, Bad Boss: How to Be the Best...and Learn from the Worst* by Robert I. Sutton

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Tread this book and squelch your inner boss-hole!

In a prior book, Robert I. Sutton wrote about jerks in the workplace, and came up with this book as a sequel. He was finding that the jerks that caused the most misery in the workplace were, unsurprisingly, bosses.

Digging into research, he found studies showing negative impacts of bad bosses, even increasing the incidence of heart attacks in their direct reports! On the flip side, having a strong leader who inspires raises performance well above average. While some think that in a time of high unemployment, managers can get away with being jerks, this doesn't really help the bottom line. For example, there is a chapter specifically on having to do the "dirty work"—implementing decisions such as layoffs that most people would rather avoid. One of the situations described in this chapter involved studying two manufacturing plants that had to go through a round of pay cuts; the plant where there was a cold, clinical approach to communicating this to employees found that thefts increased to a rate twice as much as the plant where more full, humane explanations were given before implementing the cuts.

This leads me to an aside – Sutton often refers to research, which is relatively common in popular business books, and provides full citations in end notes, which is less common (there are even URLs... which I suppose one would be able to follow in the e-book edition.) His sources range from standard business research, to stories from readers of his previous book, to blogs, and to regular business magazines and interviews. It's quite a wide survey of the effect of various management antics.

Sutton uses these sources to craft a handbook for managers to avoid acting like a "bosshole" (Sutton's term). While examples of bad behavior abound in the book, there's a lot more focus on good bosses and their behaviors than the opposite. There is advice of what sort of behavior to avoid, but also plenty

of positive, practical actions he recommends for creating a better work environment for one's direct reports. Near the end of most chapters are simple lists summarizing recommendations and insights into being a good boss and avoiding being a bad one. So for a quick taste, just thumb to the back of each chapter and check out the easy-to-read lists.

What I like about this book is its practicality and groundedness in basic principles, without spinning a grandiose theory (or an overly simplistic metaphor.) This would be the perfect gift for the newly-minted manager. ●