

# WORKING KNOWLEDGE

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## How to gain respect as a boss

**S**upermodel-turned-entrepreneur Tyra Banks recently scrapped her annual holiday so that she could pay her staff Christmas bonuses. "I've got to take care of my people," said the US talk-show queen, effortlessly ensuring the loyalty of her team and fomenting an altruistic public image in one easy stroke. But being a good boss means more than buttering up your employees and telling the press about what a nice guy you are. Most bosses have a handful of redeeming qualities, but hardly any come with the full package.

"A good boss is a combination of a manager and a leader, and the emphasis should be on the leadership skills, which can be learnt," says business-training expert Richard Denny (Denny.co.uk). "But you need to know the difference between the two, because managing people and leading them is not the same. A good boss asks himself this question, regularly:

"What sort of manager would I like to be managed by, and am I that sort of manager?"

Denny asserts that employees want more than just a nice chap who remembers their birthday and lets them take time off for kids' pantos. "Being courteous is certainly part of the package," he says, "but a good boss

is watching his people every minute of the day, not to catch them doing something wrong, but to catch them doing something right."

Clare Evans is a business mentor for The Prince's Trust and the author of *Time Management For Dummies*. She makes the observation that in many cases, bosses are just people who've been there

the longest. "I've been in environments where people get promoted because of how long they've been there, not because they necessarily have the skills to be a good leader," she says. Evans agrees that being a good boss is something you can learn, and says a good starting point is to open your ears. "Listening to your employees should be a top priority," she says. "Listen to your team and then involve them, and they will work better."

Matt Newing is the CEO of fast-growing business telecoms firm Elite, which turns over more than £5m a year. He believes that communication is everything if you want your team onside. "If you give a request to an employee, it's vital to ensure that your requirements are clear and there's no doubt about what needs to be done," he says. "One of the mistakes I used to make was not checking that my instructions were clear, which can expose you to problems further down the line." Newing's other top tip is to ask your employees to give you deadlines for completing tasks they've been set, and not the other way around.

Some of the signs that you're underperforming as a boss include poorly motivated staff, high numbers of staff absences and low productivity. "Bad bosses tend to shout, swear and belittle their employees in front of other staff," says Philip Bird, MD of The PC Support Group, who has almost 20 years of director-level management experience. "Some people think that sort of behaviour shows people who's boss, but it achieves nothing," he says. "I try to conduct myself in business as I do in life and I always aim to treat people as I would wish to be treated myself. A good boss has the ability to have a one-on-one conversation with members of the team, where they can openly tell you their issues."

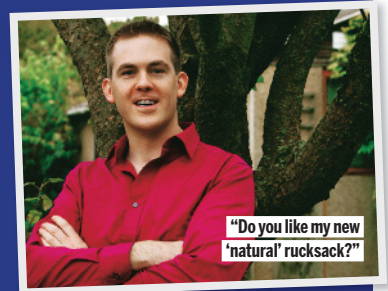
In many ways, it's all about being human. "You need to understand how people work and think," says serial entrepreneur Graham Beswick, the owner

**"A good boss watches their staff closely to catch them doing something right"**

of high-end supercar club Marque II (Marque2.com). "As a boss, you should never be surprised by people's capacity to be irrational, stupid, selfish and emotional. A bad boss is someone who can't understand this, and then gets emotional themselves. If you want to know how you're doing, check your blood pressure every once in a while..."

## Case study: Tom Ball of Cognac

Ball (below) set up London-based communication specialist Cognac (Cognac.co.uk) in 2004 after finding himself in a boardroom trying to explain the efforts of 500,000 man hours in a 15-minute presentation. "I came up with a diagram that explained it and they loved it," he says. It was a eureka moment for the fledgling entrepreneur, whose resultant start-up swiftly became a big hit with everyone from the NHS to RBS. "What we do is make difficult things simple," Ball says. "It's not a brochure people can throw in the bin, it's not a PowerPoint where people shut up and listen, it's a conversation." There are now a handful of competitors in the business of clear-thinking, "But we're all a bit different," says Ball who actively promotes a forum where his competitors and clients gather. "It's a bit scary and different, but the big game is increasing the size of the market."



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