

Psychologist Insight - Number 7

What does it take to praise your boss?

Managers stand at the critical interface between employees and organisations. Effective manager-employee relationships create the environment whereby the aspirations of individual employees can be connected to the strategic objectives of successful employers. One of the real skills of talented managers is to help employees achieve meaningful accomplishments for themselves that also benefit the organisation.

So what are some of the characteristics of such an environment? What could a manager or boss do to establish the situations where not only are their staff comfortable working for them, but they actually start to praise their boss to others?

Although a lot of organisational research is directed at finding the behavioural factors that can disrupt manager-employee relationships, somewhat less is known about what behaviours can develop this to such an extent that staff actually praise their boss.

As part of our research at GoodBoss we asked over 200 staff whether they had, or had thought about, praising their boss to their colleagues. We then linked this to aspects of their boss's behaviour using items taken from the Good Boss Questionnaire. Although the majority of boss behaviours did not have a statistically significant link to their staff praising or thinking about praising their boss, a key minority of behaviours did.

The main themes that seemed to emerge related to their boss's openness and managerial effectiveness. For instance bosses who are "poor listeners", "who fail to communicate their priorities", or who "make little effort to share information with others" were very unlikely to win praise from their staff. Bosses who "lacked warmth" or who "delayed decisions until the last moment" were also very unlikely to get praised.

On the other hand, bosses most likely to receive praise were those who were perceived as "honest", as "genuine", and as "making communication a 2-way process". Bosses who "defined objectives and milestones" and who "addressed problems promptly" were also more likely to get praised.

It is interesting to note that staff did not necessarily have to have a strong personal relationship with their boss to admire them by giving praise. It was more a sense of their boss's being properly in control of situations and then keeping their staff informed in a genuine and open way.

Tony Borkowski is an independent Chartered Occupational Psychologist, working on an on-going consultancy basis for the Good Boss Company.