

Are You Turning into THAT Boss? 4 Red Flags

Talent Culture | Mark Wachen | August 7, 2023



We often hear that people don't leave jobs, they leave managers. We all get what that means. But what does it mean for those of us who take on broader roles? As we rise through the ranks, we silently vow never to become THAT boss. You know the one. It's the manager employees

fear and avoid — the one they talk about in hushed tones or in private Slack messages.

How do you know if you're morphing into the very kind of leader you swore you'd never become?

At a time when companies are struggling with an uncertain workforce, high turnover, and a lack of employee engagement, leaders must stay focused on talent retention. This means you'll want to be extra careful not to become your employees' worst nightmare.

But what kind of signals indicate that you're the kind of boss no one wants? And how can you steer clear of this fate? Let's take a closer look...

1. THAT Boss Replaces Flexible Work Options With Rigidity

The pandemic dramatically changed our work environments. Now, after working remotely for more than three years, many leaders are eager to see an office full of employees. But some are moving too swiftly and going to extremes.

Rather than retaining some of the flexibility that became the norm when many of us were working from home, some leaders are intent on forcing employees to return to pre-COVID office standards. Yet according to multiple studies, employees prefer flexible work options. In fact, research shows that productivity and collaboration don't need to suffer when team members work from various locations.

For example, according to The Hackett Group, professionals want to work remotely 60% of the time and in the office 30% of the time. This clearly indicates that employees want the flexibility to work on their own terms. This study also found that employees who can choose their work location are more engaged. Specifically, engagement increased among 58% of those with work flexibility. Also, these respondents indicated greater willingness to remain with their current employer, rather than look elsewhere.

Some leaders are concerned that employees who aren't working in the office may not feel connected or engaged with their team. This has prompted them to implement hybrid work policies. But the Hackett Group found no change in collaboration or engagement when comparing hybrid and work-from-home models. In fact, respondents who are free to choose a flexible work model said they feel more connected with team members and with their organization's values, mission, and culture.

2. THAT Boss Needlessly Cuts Pay and/or Benefits

Budgets are tighter — and inflation and economic upheaval aren't making the situation any easier. In this kind of situation, leaders may be tempted to reduce compensation and benefits. After all, payroll is usually an organization's biggest overall cost.

But unless your company is truly in dire straits, these cuts can be a serious morale killer. It sends a message that you undervalue employees. Even worse, it suggests that you aren't willing to invest in keeping exceptional talent onboard. This can leave some of your most critical employees feeling overworked, under-appreciated, and frustrated. Ultimately, they may even become burned out.

However, it's important to keep in mind that although salary is a key issue for employees, it's not the only factor they consider when deciding whether to stick around.

According to recent Forbes Advisor research, 40% of employers say employees leave because they're attracted to better benefits elsewhere. In other words, today's workforce places a high priority on health insurance, life insurance, retirement plans, mental health support, paid time off, and other employer-sponsored programs.

This may seem obvious, but as a leader, you need to ensure that your team's basic needs are covered. This starts with fair, competitive pay. But if you also offer diverse benefits that support

employee wellbeing, people will be much more inclined to stay onboard and do their best, even during difficult times.

3. THAT Boss Doesn't Show Appreciation

Don't ignore the efforts of your greatest asset — your people. Attitude costs you nothing, and an attitude of gratitude goes a long way toward helping people feel they're valued and they belong. In fact, workplace surveys consistently show that employee appreciation and recognition programs help boost productivity, reduce absenteeism, lift engagement, and drive better business results.

There is actually science behind this. Genuine recognition and appreciation meet employees' basic psychological needs. This is why several studies equate consistent work recognition with higher pay in terms of providing a fulfilling employee experience.

We also see this in data at my company, CardSnacks. We offer electronic greetings and gift cards for holidays of all types. However, our business category is driven by ongoing employee recognition and appreciation, not just specific calendar events like Employee Appreciation Day or Administrative Professionals' Day.

It's easy to send someone a quick note or a gift card along with a heartfelt thanks. Even that small investment in time and resources strengthens your connection with employees in ways that boost their commitment and productivity.

4. THAT Boss Flubs Communications

Employees look to managers for leadership every day. Good leadership requires strong communication. Don't just focus on your team's mistakes and what hasn't been done yet. Instead, speak with empathy, communicate clearly, and try to inspire others. As a manager, make it your mission to act like the person you've most enjoyed working with in your career.

Also, remember to maintain an even keel. Organizational life is a continuous cycle of highs and lows. Effective leaders know a steady hand is essential to navigate the storms of business life. If you create an environment where people feel they're lurching from crisis to crisis, it won't be long before valued team members start jumping ship.

So stay calm, pick the right words, and set the right tone. The better you communicate, the better your results will be as a manager, and the more people will want to work with you.

Don't Become THAT Boss

No one needs you to be the worst kind of boss. Instead, you can choose to listen to your staff, show empathy and gratitude, and ensure that everyone receives compensation and benefits that outshine your competitors.

You can create a work environment that encourages your employees to be successful on their own terms. If you do this, I guarantee, you'll never need to look in the mirror and see the boss you never wanted to be.