

SILVERBACK LEADERSHIP

8 no-brainer boss strategies from the man who wrote the books on command, leadership & NICE.

BY TERRY GARRISON

B SHIFTER BUCKSLIP, Oct. 22, 2024

As Nick Brunacini and I continue developing Blue Card's Silverback Leadership Program, we view our primary role as curators, uncovering and repackaging the leadership lessons Alan V. Brunacini collected through the years. (As I go through his notes and scribbles, I can't help but imagine him sitting across from me at the breakfast table.) Reflecting on his insights, one key lesson stands out—a boss's greatest influence comes from their own actions. According to Bruno, the only thing a boss can truly control is their own behavior.

It's been a few weeks since I last wrote about our Silverback Leadership Program. In our last installment, we introduced Silverback Leadership Function 4: Boss Power. I explained that boss power is both personal and positional, and I also discussed how bosses, like all humans, have insecurities that can influence their behavior. Additionally, we shared Bruno's simple and timeless Boss Routine. In this article, we'll continue our exploration of Function 4. The following insights come directly from Bruno's book, NO-BRAINER MANAGEMENT. Here are eight ways bosses can use their own behaviors to develop effective, empowered workers.

1. Control Yourself—Having and using power feels good, but every leader must recognize both their strengths (angels) and weaknesses (demons) and then determine the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of each. You must unleash the angels while keeping the demons in check. A big ego is definitely a demon; never forget that egos eat brains.

2. Don't Take Stuff Personally—Bosses naturally attract negativity just by doing their job, and they also get a lot of smoke blown up their gazzoo. It's important to manage both. Don't let criticism hurt your feelings, and don't let flattery go higher than your heart, where it can cloud your judgment. Never dwell on how people treat you—replace fragility with resilience. Sometimes, tough stuff will happen, and your survival depends on your durability. The most valuable trait for a boss is to be consistently kind, especially when the shit hits the fan or when things go wrong or you don't get your way. This is when

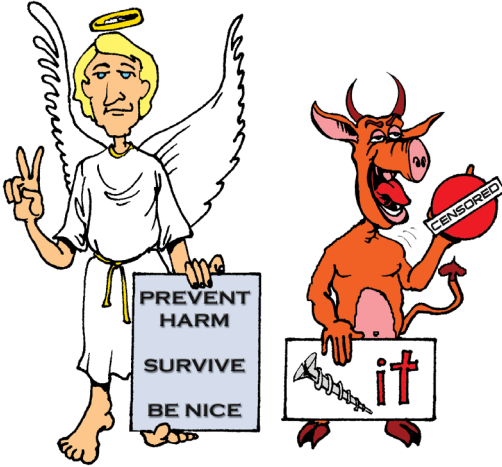


Our inner demons are wily and can undermine your power. You must keep them in check.

Continued

your team watches most closely. They want to know how you handle pressure and will learn from your reactions.

3. Play Your Position (Stay in Your Lane)—Personal (interpersonal) and positional (functional) competence are the core of a boss's power, supporting the positive relationships essential for boss effectiveness. Skip all the fancy footwork. Just do the job they pay you to do, on your level, and do it well. Hard work and competence produce genuine personal stature, earning respect and confidence from others, which form the true foundation of personal integrity.



The only thing a boss can truly control is their own behavior. Be trustworthy, prioritize worker well-being and be nice.

I remember a shift commander who raced to every fire, violating all driving SOPs en route. I don't think he understood that his role was to support the crews and provide calm leadership at the scene. He never got past not being the nozzle guy. His over-the-top, gung-ho demeanor became legendary, and people were not laughing with him. He thought he was John Wayne, but he was more like Barney Fife. Thankfully, he never got to keep a bullet in his pocket.

4. Realize You Get What You Give—Bosses must understand that their behavior creates a boomerang effect. What they put out—positive or negative—will return to them. The problem is that the negative stuff returns more quickly than the positive. There's also an inverse effect: If you hoard power, it gets smaller. By sharing power and empowering others, your influence actually grows. If you want more power, give it away. Focus on setting your employees up for success.

5. Know That More You Use Power, the Less You'll Have—Effective power is typically quiet. It's best to avoid loud displays of authority except when you need to beat your chest to get everyone's attention. Reserve this type of leadership for welfare issues that are not tied to your personal interests. Remember, the best leaders operate transparently. They prepare and empower their workers for success, then give them all the credit. A lot happens when it doesn't matter who gets the accolades.

A good boss must understand how to balance the use of power. Use too little, and activities can go unmanaged and undirected, leading to dangerous situations. If you use too much, gridlock occurs, rendering workers ineffective. Finding the sweet spot is an art form.

6. Remember How It Felt—Some of the best advice for a boss is to remember how it felt when they were a worker. The people you manage will feel the same way you did when you were on the receiving end of leadership.

Continued

**Don't let criticism hurt your feelings & don't
let flattery go higher than your heart, where it
can cloud your judgment.**

This is what drove Bruno to become a fire chief, create an effective incident command process and leadership expectations, and develop the Be Nice philosophy. He endured some very poor leadership experiences as a young firefighter and wanted better for himself, his fellow firefighters and Mrs. Smith. He successfully interrupted the ugly cycle of fire service leadership and paved a new way forward for those who followed him.

7. The Boss Sets the Tone—Bosses are role models who must demonstrate the behaviors they want from others. You must be trustworthy to be trusted, loyal to receive loyalty and nice to be treated nicely. The light shines down from above. A true leader sets the standard; this is the essence of being a boss.

8. Remember THE WORK—Focus on the work it takes to serve the customer, the workers who deal directly with the customers and those behind the scenes who support your public-facing employees. Skip the games and home in on the business of business. When the workers do well, reinforce it with a sensible, sincere, positive reaction. When there are performance issues, coach an effective solution. The most “Un-Nice” thing a boss can do is accept substandard performance.

Join us for the next installment as we move on to Function 5: Performance Management. I will discuss the Performance Management and Accountability models and describe how they can make you a stronger leader. **BS**



In 2007, Terry Garrison retired from the Phoenix Fire Department after serving more than 30 years. Working for Alan Brunacini and reaching the rank of assistant chief of operations helped shape Terry's consistent values: firefighter safety and customer service. After a quick retirement, Terry served as the fire chief of the Oceanside (Calif.) Fire Department for almost three years. He then served as the chief of the Houston Fire Department for more than five years. Terry eventually moved back to where he was raised and served as the fire chief for the Glendale (Ariz.) Fire Department for more than six years before officially retiring from government service. Including his two years in the U.S. Army, Terry has worked for the government and worn a nametag and a helmet for more than 47 years. (Thank goodness for helmets.) In addition, he has traveled throughout the world teaching Fire Command, utilizing his master's degree in education. Today, Terry and his wife, Annette, live in Phoenix. He will continue to stay connected to the fire service by working with B SHIFTER. His most important role is being the best buddy to his grandson Jack, pictured with him here.