



Who's Bossing The Bosses? Sweat The Big Stuff

Published Aug. 4, 2009

Most organizations are in sweat denial. It's like a cozy club where the power players agree to turn a blind eye and fiddle around the edges. Middle managers protect their managers. Top leaders don't know what's going on down below.

According to a Corporate Leadership Council study the single most important factor affecting staff engagement is the quality of a person's manager, and another study found that 80% of people who resign from their jobs do so because they can't stand their boss. A Gallup poll revealed recently that nearly 25 percent of all employees in the U.S. would fire their boss if given the chance.

Yet according to former IBM human resources executive Andrew O'Keefe, most organizations avoid fixing the biggest internal restraint on their business – lifting the capability of their managers and holding the managers to account for their people responsibilities. O'Keefe is author of the new novel, *The Boss*, from Greenleaf Book Group Press (www.hardwiredhumans.com). He believes that company leaders and human resources professionals fail in their employee/employer relationship because they don't recognize the obvious – that it's about addressing the tough stuff of bossing the bosses. Many organizations prefer to sweat the small stuff.

"There is a light bulb that needs to be turned on to overcome a fundamental blind spot," said O'Keefe, who is also a human resources consultant. "We don't realize, or don't acknowledge, that the relationship people have with their boss is emotional. We have attended to the issue of management as though it is rational – it's not. It's emotional. When you ask people about their boss, as I have done, you get an instant emotional reaction – good or bad. I rarely received a neutral response."

"The reason I wrote *The Boss* as a novel based on true stories is to reveal that the relationship between people and their boss is emotion, and that the relationship has a major impact on people's spirit and output.

O'Keefe believes that companies can systematically lift the quality of managers in their organizations and reduce the negative emotional response and sapping of staff energy by following five simple rules.

Design a "Doable" Job – To enable managers to do their job, their role first needs to be structured so that they have a sensible number of people reporting to them. More than

nine people get managers into trouble. Moreover, organizations have to articulate clear expectations and define what constitutes success for the manager in the eyes of top management.

Hire Well – Hiring is 90 percent of success; so don't let middle managers appoint lower level managers without review. Use the hiring step to lift the caliber of your managers and ensure they have people skills.