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Becoming the boss... *and letting go!*

"If you only do what you know you can do, you never do very much."

TOM KRAUSE, motivational speaker,
teacher and coach



BY SUE
EDWARDS

The transition to the role of "boss" is one of the most significant steps in business. It can also be a very risky time. Many successful business founders struggle with managing their first staff member. It's equally common for expert individual contributors in large companies to flounder when they are promoted to managing others.

Ironically, it's not so much the transition to all the new responsibilities that seems to take the biggest toll – it's what you need to "let go of" to be successful as boss. Letting go of previously successful approaches is one of the most frequent coaching topics for my leadership-coaching clients.

Why this sudden about-face? Why would certain behaviours be considered strengths one day and weaknesses a week later?

Think of situations where you've been recognized for a particular >

strength. Let's take "rolling up your sleeves and getting things done" as an example. For much of your career you've been rewarded for showing initiative and accomplishing things yourself. Then, when you are promoted to the director level, this strength doesn't seem to earn you the respect it once did. Your boss starts telling you to stand back and delegate instead. You are told to get your nose out of the day-to-day issues and address longer-term strategic concerns.

Interestingly enough, I've noticed that the challenge of making these shifts seems to be particularly difficult for people who have had the most previous success. It can be frightening to move from a place of high-achievement to a place of "not knowing" and uncertainty. It's uncomfortable to move from expert mode to learner mode. This discomfort can result in resistance to pursuing new skills and a desire to continue relying on

proven success strategies from the past.

If you are a business owner hiring your very first staff member, try to set aside your anxiety about whether she will take equally good care of your "baby" and step into the shoes of your new employee for a moment. Have you ever experienced working for a boss who watches your every move like a hawk and continually tells you how to do things "their way"?

Take a deep breath and remember that you've hired a great person, and there's simply no value in hiring anyone if you end up doing both your job and theirs. The best bosses, as we all know, are those who have enough faith in their direct reports to coach them through finding their own best answers and taking full accountability for their job.

If you are working in an organization and have been promoted to your first managerial role, keep in mind that the best way to serve your direct reports is to give them the room to do what you used to do. You will now be judged not just on what YOU get done, but how well your direct reports develop and achieve.

It's a challenging transition indeed. But I'm confident that if you hold yourself to the standard of the boss with whom you flourished, you will foster the right atmosphere for both you and your new employee to continue to grow and thrive. •

Sue Edwards is president of Development by Design, a leadership coaching firm, specializing in supporting leaders in new roles. www.clearingthe90dayburdle.com. Clients work with Sue to set themselves up for success at the next level of the organization or their businesses.



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