New survey confirms old theory: Bad bosses cause most worker stress

TOXIC BOSS TRAITS

Not listening to feedback

Excessive self-interest

Lying and inconsistency

Not holding people accountable

A new Society for Human Resource Management survey affirms the workplace adage that employees leave managers, not companies. Fully 84% of U.S. workers polled said poorly trained managers create a lot of unnecessary work and stress.

The survey of U.S. workers examined their perspective on how ill-equipped—or well-equipped—their supervisors were to manage people, the most important skills managers need to develop and how a better manager could improve their own performance as an individual contributor.

Among the survey's key findings:

- 84% of American workers say poorly trained managers create a lot of unnecessary work and stress
- 57% of American workers say managers in their workplace could benefit from training on how to be a better manager
- 50% feel their own performance would improve if their direct supervisor received additional training in people management. The top five skills supervisors and managers could improve: Communicating effectively (41%), developing and training the team (38%), managing time and delegating (37%), cultivating a positive and inclusive team culture (35%), and managing team performance (35%).

Make sure you're not a toxic boss

Some managers, let's face it, are toxic. They alienate employees with their bad attitudes.

You're not one of them—are you? Make sure by checking out this list of toxic behaviors that managers should avoid, from *Psychology Today.*

Not listening to feedback

Nobody's perfect, not even you. The only way to improve your performance is to listen to feedback from colleagues, customers, and even employees. An unwillingness to listen makes you appear arrogant and uninterested in anyone else's point of view.

Excessive self-interest

Yes, you've got to promote yourself, but everything shouldn't be about you. Be sure to credit your employees for their hard work, and share news of successes around your organization so your workforce knows you're all in this together.

Lying and inconsistency

If you get caught in a lie, your credibility will suffer. The same thing happens if you say one thing and do another. Tell the truth, even if you have to say, "I don't know," and follow your values even when it's inconvenient.

Not holding people accountable

Employees will notice if you cut your favorites some slack while punishing others for poor results. Don't be an ogre when things go wrong, but do explore what happened so employees know you're committed to excellence from everyone.

4 questions and phrases to use regularly with your employees

You know that communicating regularly with your employees is key to guiding and leading them to perform to the best of their ability, but when you and your employees are juggling multiple tasks, projects and priorities, it can be too easy to focus on the work employees are doing in the here and now, while glossing over critical conversations that will help you understand what they think, feel and care about professionally.

Here are four questions and phrases all managers should include in employee conversations to deepen your relationships.

1. "Tell me."

Research on effective negotiation techniques reveals that the words "tell me" make it easier to understand another person's point of view, and invite the opportunity to learn more about the dynamics of any situation,

free of judgment or assumptions.

When you lead employee conversations with "tell me more about the situation" or "tell me what you need," you give your staff free reign to share their honest opinion and point of view, in as much or as little detail as they want to include, and the power to present a situation that is positive, or a problem to be solved. The words "tell me" inherently mean there is no right or wrong answer.

As a manager, these words can be one of the most effective ways to gather perspectives from a number of employees, while learning more about what they consider important.

2. "You make a difference to this team/company."

Lack of employee praise and recognition is the reason that half of all employees in the United States seek out new job opportunities, according to one Gallup study. But, delivery of consistent and genuine praise is also an area you can easily control, regardless of the rewards structure your human resources department has in place.

To deliver praise in a way that is genuine and specific to each employee, pay attention to the unique attributes and contributions each member of your team brings to their role, the team and the workplace overall. Deliver specific praise that communicates you see and acknowledge how important their contributions are, why and how they've uniquely influenced the dynamic or outcome of a project, interaction or a situation for the better.

Whether an employee has led a cross-functional team to bring a complex project to fruition on time or under budget, or simply always brings a positive attitude that makes the team function better, acknowledge the work your employees do, and tell them exactly how the skills, insights and energy they bring to the workplace matter.

3. "What can we as a company/team do better?"

Your employees likely have a "front row seat" to processes, challenges and areas that are lacking in efficacy that you simply don't have as a manager. They are your biggest asset when it comes to spotting opportunities to improve, and addressing small issues before they mushroom into much larger hurdles. Make it a point to ask your employees what's not working or what they'd improve if they owned the company regularly.

Not only will you gain more visibility into what's happening behind the scenes, you send the message that employee viewpoints beyond task completion are not only welcome, but critically important.

4. "What goal is most important to you right now?"

Employee goal-setting should be a collaborative process that aligns your employee's strengths, interests and longer-term career pursuits with company and team priorities.

As your employees develop professionally and personally, their interests and goals will likely change. You can have a significant impact on employee retention, motivation and development by having ongoing conversations with your employees about the goals they are working towards, how you can support their success, and what they'd like to progress to next.

When employees accomplish their goals, you'll be better prepared to assign work that continues their positive momentum, and keeps them engaged and interested.