



## Planning for nonprofits and philanthropy

# How to Be a Good Boss



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*In every workplace, supervisor/supervisee relations impose interpersonal dynamics that can make each day fulfilling or one of many other things. Nonprofits offer unique management challenges when staffing is inadequate, budgets are squeezed tight, and (sometimes) union rules pose limitations.*

Aphoristically, all happy workplaces are alike; each unhappy workplace is unhappy in its own way. This series of eblasts posits that the tone and temper of positive interpersonal dynamics are set by good bosses and there is much alike among those who are good.

**Supervision is responsibility.** As soon as an employee becomes a supervisor, s/he accepts responsibilities with greater weight; in a nonprofit, responsibility is to the mission of the organization, its board, its management, the people it serves, and to federal, state and local law.

**A boss is not a friend.** Especially important for those who become the supervisor of former co-workers, the intimacies of peer relationships must be left behind. You need not abandon empathy and concern, but, perhaps confidences can no longer be shared in quite the same way.

**Bosses learn to be bosses.** Astute leaders learn to adopt good qualities from those they've worked for, and eschew bad ones as they've worked their way up. Especially when leadership doesn't come naturally, making a list of what worked (and what didn't) in every work environment you've been in can help you shape your behavior as a boss.

Really competent employees can be frustrated bosses when they believe they can do the job of a direct report more effectively or more efficiently. It can take willpower to resist the temptation to 'do' and, instead, to 'direct.' Good bosses know employees are happier (and more productive) when their accomplishments are their own.

**Clarify expectations.** Every management relationship should begin with a clear set of expectations, discussed and written. Those expectations should be reviewed and updated regularly. In a healthy relationship, they're agreed upon mutually.

**Set priorities.** Be effective as a boss not by telling those you manage *when* to do *what* to do, but by setting priorities amongst a list of assignments – a shorter list for those who prefer specificity and a longer list for those who perform best with a degree of independence.

**Provide tools.** Since employee performance will vary by education, experience, skills, interests, and other competencies, good bosses give every employee a fighting chance to succeed. They do so by equitably providing appropriate tools for everyone they supervise – technology, training and access to human, financial, and informational resources. No employee should feel that lack of parity with co-workers is an issue when their performance is reviewed.

Whether you are the CEO or a first-time manager of other employees, as a “boss” you are more than a supervisor. Your role is not just to “oversee” the work of others; it is also to facilitate, motivate and enable (in the best sense of the word). Good communication is key.

**Offer support.** Regularly scheduled meetings (weekly or bi-weekly) should be sacrosanct offering each team member an opportunity for 1:1 conversation to report on progress, get direction, help prioritize and provide correction. Use a set time and day, and avoid frequent changes so direct reports know that you respect their schedules as well.

**Aim for yes.** In a world where “no” is an easy fallback, finding a way to “green light” good ideas and strong ambition aligns you with an employee’s desire to succeed. And...saying “yes” whenever possible makes a “no” easier to hear when you must inevitably say it.

**Provide feedback.** High performing nonprofits have a performance evaluation program that requires an annual sit-down between manager and employee. But regular feedback makes those sometimes-awkward yearly conversations so much easier. No surprises! Note: Providing corrective feedback can give even the steeliest boss a sleepless night. Try writing a script that begins with positives, lists the negatives, and gives specific examples of how a behavior or action (done differently) might improve individual or team performance.

## Building a Good Team

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When direct reports are more than one, a good boss is also charged with building an effective team. And because most of us spend more uninterrupted time at our workplace than anywhere else, making it a fulfilling and mutually supportive environment is important to your employees' happiness.

**Communicate with transparency.** Use regularly-scheduled team meetings to share information important to everyone. Demonstrate that every member of the team has value by offering a chance for each to share a highlight of their current work and contribute to a group decision.

**Find reason to celebrate.** In a healthy workplace, individual and team success, achievement and milestones (even a one-year employment anniversary) should be celebrated at every opportunity. We're more likely to do our best work when we know it is recognized and, our role is appreciated.

**Don't hesitate to say goodbye.** Terminating employment is a solemn responsibility for any boss. But poor performance must be addressed definitively because its impact is widely felt by every member of a team.



# About Us

## Plan A

## Advisors

**Plan A** was founded in 2013 by Evan Kingsley and Adam Gaynor as a new kind of **consulting** practice to design and facilitate **highly individualized** approaches to the unique needs of clients, their audiences, leadership, and financial and organizational platforms.

Together they have more than **40 years of experience** in nonprofits, social enterprises, philanthropy and organizational development across the **widest range** of organizations, institutions and philanthropies.

Plan A works with the **board and executive leadership** of agencies, institutions, organizations and funders to design the most **effective and efficient paths** to setting and meeting **realizable goals**, driven by a **strong and compelling vision**.

Plan A projects include **strategic and business planning, governance, mergers and fundraising**.



Ready to set an introductory meeting? Please get in touch. We welcome your inquiry and take great pride and pleasure in guiding you and your organization to the right solution for your needs.

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