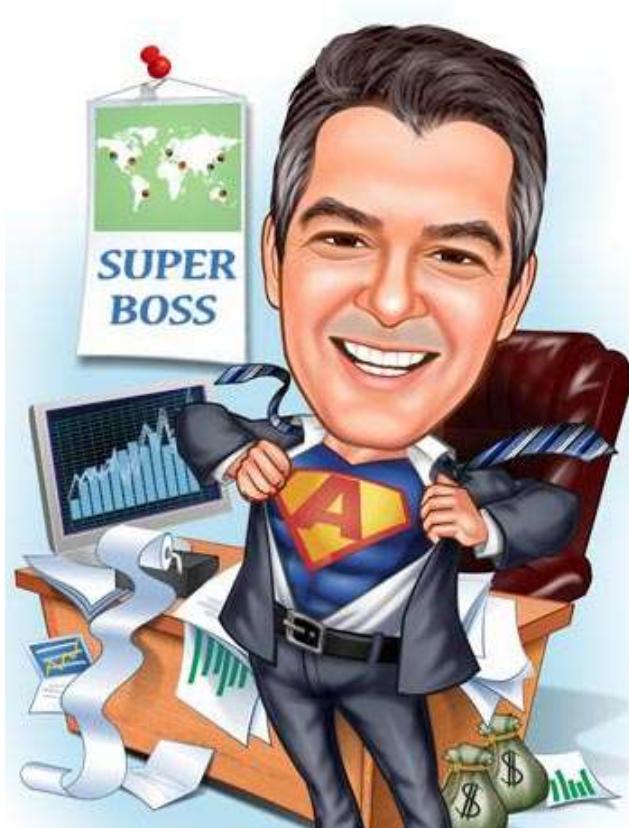


How the Pandemic Can Turn Bad Bosses Into Good Ones

By Samuel A. Culbert

It's impossible to be a controlling boss in a remote-work world. What matters now is helping employees deliver results however best they can.



imperfections. We all have different ways at arriving at the results the company needs. But most bosses fail to recognize that. Instead, they try to impose their way of doing things on employees.

In other words, the most important relationship in any organization—between a boss and an employee—is too often a farce. It isn't, “How can we work together to get results?” It's, “How can I, the boss, force you to become more like me, even if we all suffer because of it?”

The cost is incalculable. It includes unhappy employees who feel their skills are wasted and voices unheard, bosses who never understand why others are failing to live up to their expectations, and companies whose results aren't nearly what they could be.

Enter the pandemic, and specifically remote work, and everything has the potential, the *imperative*, to change.

Suddenly, the past method of managing—of controlling how employees work—becomes impossible. That's because managers now have no way of knowing the individual workplace and

For bosses now, the key is to listen to what their employees need and how to help them.

The job of a manager is simple and clear: Create an environment in which employees can do their best work.

Sadly, few managers pull this off. As I have seen in a lifetime of teaching and consulting, executives are prone to mistake “managing” for “control.”

But here's the good news: The pandemic is making it much easier to be a good manager.

To understand why, it's important to first recognize why there are so many bad bosses. For too many managers, there is just one truth, just one way of doing things—*their* way.

But think about it. We're all different, with our own skills and abilities and

environment in which each of their employees operates. As they are confronted with more variables than they can possibly control, the fallacy of the old way of managing is inevitably exposed.

Even the most stuck-in-their-ways managers in these difficult times have to admit they don't know beans about where any employee is coming from or what that individual faces at home. All they know is that they better find out about any obstacles to that employee's working at his or her best.

Managing, therefore, can no longer be about whether the employee is doing the job the way the manager thinks it should be done. Instead, the focus shifts to *results*, however they are reached. The focus switches to providing what the employee needs to get the end results the company requires so everyone can keep their job—the manager as well as the employee.

For bosses at a loss as to how to proceed, the key is to begin with one basic question for their employees: "What do you need from me, and how can I be of help?"

Such active inquiry and active listening, which managers have been able to resist for so long, changes the dynamic between employer and employee. Asking focused questions and shutting up long enough to hear the answers is the only way I know of for managers to get the information they need to manage effectively for results.

It allows managers to determine which employees need their presence and who works best on a "don't call me, I'll call you when I need your help" basis. It allows bosses to focus on what really matters—results—and not so much on the path individual employees take to get those results.

This is why the pandemic is the best managerial-improvement training program I could ever imagine. It has thrown a lot of organizations into managerial turmoil. And it may turn out that turmoil is just what a lot of managers needed.