

My Favorite Superboss

by Jeffrey Leventry

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A few weeks ago I came across a book that aroused my curiosity, especially since I have worked for many managers over the course of my business career. The book is entitled “Superbosses – How Exceptional Leaders Master the Flow of Talent” by Sydney Finkelstein. The author is a Dartmouth professor who performed 10 years of research and conducted over 200 interviews to uncover the existence of a unique category of supervisor called the Superboss.

What is a Superboss?

According to the Professor, a Superboss is different from regular bosses because she enables people to accomplish more than they ever thought possible. As a result, Superbosses accelerate the careers of those who work for them. They also possess a track record of spawning talent in their industry. In fact, he determined that if you look at the top executives in an industry you will discover that many of them have worked for the same person as they advanced in their careers.

Who are considered examples of Superbosses?

The concept of the Superboss exists in all areas of society, including business, entertainment, politics, and professional sports. In the business world most would agree that Jack Welch and Larry Ellison are Superbosses. In entertainment, Lorne Michaels has spawned a host of comedic talent thanks to the popular “Saturday Night Live” show. An example from the world of politics is Ronald Reagan, whose Vice President became President following the Reagan years. In professional sports the concept is called a “Coaching Tree” and includes the likes of Bill Walsh (San Francisco 49ers), Mike Holmgren (Green Bay Packers) and George Karl (Denver Nuggets).

What qualities do they possess?

Professor Finkelstein has determined that Superbosses share 5 characteristics. They are confident, competitive, imaginative, authentic, and they possess high levels of integrity. In addition, they are innovators and expect their employees to mirror this ability in their daily work lives. As you might expect, the Superboss also expects world class performance from employees and she does her part as a genuine leader to inspire performance and instill self-confidence on the part of team members.

How are they different than normal bosses?

Superbosses are different from the average boss in the way they recruit, motivate, coach, and inspire employees in consistent but unconventional ways. When hiring, they look for people with unusual intelligence, creativity, and flexibility. Through nurturing and coaching, the Superboss then guides the recruit down a path that produces exceptional outcomes. They also tend to be opportunistic and continuously explore ways to transition employees into roles that maximize individual strengths while contributing to strategic goals. In summary, they make a deliberate effort to provide an environment where performance can flourish – ultimately resulting in highly successful careers for their staff.

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As I reflected on the concepts articulated in the book “Superbosses” I realized that I have had the privilege of working for several Superbosses over the course of my career. It also occurred to me that I have developed a close personal relationship with a woman who clearly meets the criteria set forth by Professor Finkelstein in his book. Based upon my personal experience and interactions with those who have worked for her, I know that she is admired and trusted by her direct reports. She is also viewed as a nurturer who guides her employees to reach their maximum potential.

Additionally, she is highly confident, imaginative, authentic and possesses a high level of integrity. She expects world class performance from employees and instills self-confidence in her team members. Finally, she has a track record of launching business professionals into highly successful careers in her industry.

I have discussed these traits and concepts with her on numerous occasions and I have reminded her that 20 plus years of mentoring and developing others is her legacy – and one that will pave the way for the next generation of leaders.

As you may have guessed, my favorite Superboss is none other than my wife of nearly 25 years. She is not only an inspiration to her employees and her children, but also to me as I coach business professionals who desire to achieve career success in their chosen profession.

If you would like to understand the “playbook” of best practices that you can use to enhance your managerial and leadership skills as you strive to become the next Superboss, please contact us.