



## Strategies for Finding a Good Manager to Work For

*Job satisfaction depends largely on the quality of your manager, so doing homework on potential supervisors is vital.*

by Hannah Pitstick

*When looking for a new job or transfer, employees have several variables to consider, including salary, promotion potential and job responsibilities. But if they hope to thrive in a new workplace, they should make sure the job comes with a good manager.*

Research has backed up the claim that people leave managers, not companies, including a 2015 Gallup study of 7,272 U.S. adults that found 50 percent of employees left their job “to get away from their manager to improve their overall life at some point in their career.”

Significant research has been conducted to get to the bottom of what makes a good manager, but the traits of a good manager are not so different from those of an empathetic person.

“The qualities employees are looking for in a manager are the same anyone would be looking for in a good human being,” said Bernard Marr, an author and consultant based in England. “People want fairness, respect and recognition; they want someone who listens and is a good and consistent communicator; someone who supports, sets a clear vision and expectations, challenges and inspires people and creates a no-blame culture.”

Because management is such a crucial variable in job satisfaction, it is wise to research and vet the managers at companies you’re hoping to work for, just as they vet their prospective employees. It may take a few phone calls and some internet sleuthing to find the right sources, but a little due diligence on your part can boost your chances of career fulfillment. Don’t be afraid to tap your network and online resources such as LinkedIn, Indeed and others to help answer the question: Will this manager help make me a happier, more empowered employee? Once you’ve done that, use the interview process to see if your values align with a potential manager’s values.

Here are a few traits to look for and tips on how to spot them when trying to determine if someone will be a good manager to work for:

### Forms Genuine Relationships With Employees

The best managers will connect with their employees and demonstrate genuine care and respect.

That sort of connection isn’t formed through a one-on-one held once a week where you go through a tick-box exercise, but rather by asking what’s going on in their lives and being aware when an employee might need some extra support.

“It’s more the informal, sit down with a cup of coffee, and discuss where you are at and where you would like to grow,” said Teresa Kruger, Ph.D., senior manager, People and Business Solutions for BDO South Africa, based in Johannesburg, South Africa. “I think that has a lot more value than any formal structures.”

During the job interview process, you might get a hint of how your potential boss views the employee-manager relationship by taking note of whether they seem curious about you as a person. Do they ask you anything other than directly work-related questions? If you ask about their life or background, do they get uncomfortable or annoyed? Depending on the type of boss you prefer, it may be a red flag if they show little interest in you other than your potential work output.

### Recognizes Strengths and Empowers Employees to Use Them

A good manager will keep you engaged, and you will be less likely to leave a company. They provide growth opportunities and encourage you to learn from projects you have ownership in.

If the potential for growth is important to you, ask during the interview about what opportunities employees have for skill building at the company and how often they are allowed to work on a project with minimal oversight.

"I think micromanagement was out of the window long ago," Kruger said. "It's definitely more about a coaching and mentoring type of relationship between employee and manager and allowing the scope and opportunity to grow."

Employees want to be utilized in a manner that highlights all their strengths, she added, and managers can facilitate that by figuring out what those skills are and thoughtfully placing employees on projects they are best suited for.

Talk to current and past employees of the company about their career trajectories. If you find stagnated employees stuck in long-term positions without gaining new responsibilities or skills, it could be a sign management is not empowering them.

### **Fosters Honesty and Vulnerability**

Managers can create a healthy, trusting environment by letting employees know that everyone can be vulnerable. How a potential manager reacts to your answers about your shortcomings and areas you want to grow in can be a gauge of whether your potential boss practices and encourages vulnerability and honesty.

"Being vulnerable doesn't mean they're weak, but it does mean they can be open about their shortcomings and they're not going to be attacked for it — they're going to be supported in them," said Drew Dudley, founder of Day One Leadership, a Toronto-based leadership coaching organization.

"A manager makes that clear by demonstrating it, by being open about the things they're not good at or the things they need help with, and it gives permission to the employees to do the same thing. Then what happens is people aren't spending their energy covering up the things they're afraid of or bad at. They're spending their energy doing their best work."

If it seems appropriate, ask about ways a potential manager is planning to improve the company or employee morale to see how they discuss weaknesses or areas that could use improvement. It's a good sign if they

***"When a supervisor becomes a thought partner with you, you can get the job done more effectively, not just efficiently."***

look at vulnerabilities as a starting point for potentially exciting growth rather than blemishes that need to be covered up.

### **Maintains Consistency and Fairness**

Dudley maintains that along with vulnerability, consistency is necessary to create an environment of trust.

"Consistency means the employees know that the manager has a set of clear criteria for decision-making, which means no matter what the decision, they're going to make it using the same criteria every time," Dudley said.

Consistency is essential when it comes to how managers deal with delivering criticism and discipline.

"If I come late, I'm going to be dealt with in a certain way, but if someone else comes late and they don't get the same treatment, obviously I'm going to start thinking, 'Hang on, there's something wrong here,' and that's where a lot of managers lose that credibility," Kruger said.

The best way to figure out whether a potential boss is consistent is by speaking with past and current employees, if possible. During the interview process you could ask your potential boss about company policies that are important to you. Then you could verify those answers with past or present employees to see if the responses match up with the reality of how the boss handles various situations.

### **Promotes Clear Communication**

Saving perhaps the most obvious for last, good managers need to maintain clear and effective communication.

"A good manager is someone who is clear, who listens, and they're not just always telling, but understanding what it is their people need," said Bob Hewes, Ph.D., senior partner at

Camden Consulting Group based in Boston. "When a supervisor becomes a thought partner with you, you can get the job done more effectively, not just efficiently."

A potential manager's communication skills can at least partially be revealed during the interview process. Do they maintain eye contact? Do they seem genuinely curious about what you're saying? Are they asking questions about areas that are important to you? And do they comprehend and enthusiastically answer any questions you have for them?

Beyond being an effective listener, good managers make an effort to look past behavior to the underlying cause and address problems with empathy.

"People leave because of managers, that's what the data says, but I always point out to managers that at the foundation of any individual or organizational dysfunction, there is a fear," Dudley says. "People are afraid that they're going to have something taken away (money, a job, influence, respect) or they're afraid they're going to have something given to them they don't want (more work, a task they're not equipped for), and when you deal with issues at the level of the fear that generates them, rather than the behavior that emerges, you're always going to be better off." ■

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