

The Fine Line of Being a Boss and Friend



A lot has changed in the workplace since your father spent his 30 years being a company man. It used to be that bosses were just that, bosses. They commanded respect, called all the shots, were imposing and held your livelihood in their hands. The boss was the last guy you wanted to piss off.

While some things remain the same, there's a lot that's changed too. Sure, the boss is still the person in charge. But, if you're in a position of leadership, you've probably realized that how you go about your business and interact with the people you manage is vastly different from the model of old. Instead of barking orders, handing out disciplinary actions and leading by fear, you now have to play the part of mentor, friend, confidant and communicator. If it sounds like you have to be both a boss and friend in order to be an effective leader in the modern workplace, it's because it's true.

Honesty

If you think about your closest friends, it's expected that you're honest with each other. The same goes for your relationships at work. If an employee isn't making the grade, they need to know. Keep in mind that when you deliver constructive criticism, you need to both be tactful and not beat around the bush. Your employees want honesty and transparency and it's your job to deliver it.

The same holds true for [communicating with employees](#) when they go above and beyond. If you notice someone performing exceptionally well, by all means let them know. At the end of the day, you're expected to be candid with your feedback

both positive and constructive.

There's No "I" in Team

You're the one in charge, that's a fact. But guess what? You're in charge of a team. In order for your organization perform optimally, it has to be a total team effort. That means creating the space for everyone's voice to be heard in the decision-making process. When issues arise, it's imperative that you solicit feedback from everyone. Sure, some people's ideas won't be realistic, but the mere fact that they had a chance to be heard means the world and also helps them get on board with the final decision. At least they were heard.

Hang Out

There's an ongoing debate about crossing professional lines when it comes to socializing and recreating with colleagues. The old guard maintains that work should stay at the office while the new school of thought encourages social interaction outside the office. While there's no defined line, studies have shown that engaging with your colleagues in a relaxed environment humanizes the experience and can actually be a catalyst for innovative ideas and candid conversations without fear of reprimand. So, maybe that Friday happy hour isn't such a bad idea after all.

BUT, the terms change when it comes to social media. It's absolutely fine to endorse someone for a skill on LinkedIn. However, overly engaging and Facebook and Instagram is never a good idea. First, doing so can be seen as an invasion of privacy. Second, if you're the boss that "creeps" or "pries," you liable to stir a hornet's nest and open yourself up to all sorts of negative accusations and outcomes. It can become an HR nightmare.

Keep it Professional

We've all heard stories about working relationships becoming more... And by more we mean romantic. Though it goes without saying, this is something that's worth repeating. Even if there's an energy, mutual attraction, shared interests or whatever, mixing work with pleasure is never a good idea. The conflicts of interest, propensity for office rumors and not to mention people's lives are at

stake. So please, don't let interoffice romance ruin your career or someone else's.

Be Supportive and Empathetic

Everyone that works for you is human. And with that experience comes hard times on occasion. If someone on your team is going through a tough divorce, the loss of a loved one or any other personal struggle, you need to be there for them. Maybe you're the only one they can talk to in a moment of need. Just the simple act of listening can be more meaningful than you might think.

If someone you manage comes to you and asks for help or advice, it's your duty to assist however you can. Not only is it the decent thing to do, it can often be the difference in the employee continuing to perform or not making the grade, or even deciding to stay with the company or look for other opportunities.

It's a fine line you're going to have to walk as a leader. The line between boss and friend. There's no plug-and-play formula that shows you exactly how to do it. With that being said, if you make a conscious effort to stay within professional bounds while showing everyone on your team that you're a human just like them, your entire organization only stands to benefit.