

Doing Good Work Matters!

A 21st Century Guide for Getting More Out of Your Job and More Out of Life

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Suggestions for teaching/facilitating a discussion to assure a high impact learning experience:

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Summing it all up – what facilitators and teachers want to accomplish by teaching from this book.

As my good friend and colleague, Linda Gorchels said after reading my book:

“...most of the books and articles have been written for the management side (of the coin)....As I began reading the first few chapters from my management viewpoint, a little voice in my head kept saying: “but...” as in “but workers must also accept responsibility for their part of the relationship with their bosses.” It took me a while to realize that I had not yet turned the coin over to listen from a new perspective....While Will wrote the book for workers, it can be a useful tool for managers to take a step back and “listen” to the words of employees....He also provided inspirational tips for workers to make their daily lives better (tips I might add that can also help managers in their own lives).”

My goal is to challenge both ‘bosses’ and workers to think about their roles in creating a better workplace. As you teach the book, be sure to identify lasting takeaways from the discussion that ensues. For instance, when discussing the *Laws of Being Turned Off*, flip the coin and have students discuss ways that bosses can avoid doing the very things that Turn Off workers. To avoid oversimplification, seek agreement on what it would take to standardize new practices and ask “what does a boss risk by doing this?” Students should realize that change is risky (for instance, what if workers just take advantage of their boss, what then?). Discussion can also include, “What would be the best way to begin the change process?” This should lead to varied possibilities, ranging from formal announcements to having bosses start doing things differently and let the change be felt by the workforce. For those wanting to bring theory into the discussion, it is a simple matter of asking students probing questions such as “Given the management theories we’ve discussed, when bosses do these things, what seems to be their orientation?”

From a practical side, both the *Laws of Being Turned Off* and the *Bull’s-eyes* should give bosses and workers anchors that guide their ensuing efforts – making the workplace better for everyone.

For bosses, it becomes a matter of taking the insights and making them an ongoing company-wide commitment at their companies.

For workers, it can make life at work more tolerable, even enjoyable. I always find that when one’s mind is “turned on”, good things happen. The ultimate payoff for workers is that it can truly make life better – meaning that more positive energy is part of the workplace but, even more important, more positive energy can be brought home to family and friends.

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A great way to start the discussion is with the question, “Who is this book talking about...that is, who is a Worker?” Pretty soon, the discussion will shift from “the usual suspects”, ie, blue collar workers, service workers, etc. to the realization that it is anyone who has a boss. This means that for the majority of people, there is both an upward looking (at the behaviors of one’s own boss) and downward reflecting (at how we are treating our subordinates) potential for drawing insights from the book.

It is a fact of working life that nearly everyone is accountable to a boss. This realization will make it all the more clear to students that they themselves will likely be both a boss and a worker during their careers. It also makes it all-the-more important that they understand ***Doing Good Work Matters!*** from both perspectives.

Use the book to challenge students to internalize their important current and future roles of being a worker and of being a boss. ***Doing Good Work Matters!*** helps students understand that a large part of the work in being a good boss comes from overcoming or avoiding tendencies suggested in the Laws of Being Turned Off. It also helps students understand why they should strive to be better workers – not just for bosses but for themselves.

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Assignment: Interview with a worker

Before sending students off on this assignment, you might want to ask, “I am about to give you an assignment that requires you to interview a worker. Given what you know about “workers” and the book you’ve just read, what positions/jobs might be appropriate for this task?”

Don’t be surprised if this leads students to focus on “blue collar” or “lower level” service jobs at first. Then, press them to think about what are the qualifications of being a “worker”. This should lead to the realization that in any job where there is a boss there are workers, aka, the workers class (those who deal with good or bad bosses). The delineation between bosses and workers helps students realize that these issues are faced throughout one’s career.

Once this is understood, students can approach the task by interviewing nearly anyone (as long as the interviewee has a job and a boss!).

The Task

Have students tell the prospective interviewee that they are working on a class project focused on the best...and worst...behaviors of bosses. The purpose is to better understand how to create a focused, energized workforce.

Then, have students develop a set of questions. The goal is to find best and worst of bosses actions. So, the questions take two directions: (1) would they describe a situation where their boss handled something really well, where the workers found themselves feeling good about themselves, their jobs, and/or were more motivated. (2) would they describe a situation where their boss handled something really poorly (it could be a past job or their present job – many people are hesitant to say bad things about present jobs – btw, you could ask students why might this be the case.), where the workers found themselves feeling down about themselves, their jobs, and/or were less motivated.

Using a laddering technique, students should take the information being shared and ask ensuing questions. In laddering, you begin with a point you’ve just heard and ask a question such as “why do you think that everyone responded so well to (the action that a boss had taken)?” That is, the laddering metaphor relies on the idea that something you just learned is a step on the ladder toward more (underlying) learning.

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Assignment: Interview with a worker (continued)

On the due date of the assignment, the in-class activity can take a number of forms. The following is one effective technique (this is followed by another technique).

1. At the start of class, write each of the *Laws Of Being Turned Off* on the blackboard. Alternatively, put one law on the top of each of 7 flipchart pages that are posted around the room.
2. Either handle the writing yourself, or ask students to volunteer to stand next to a posted Law and write down examples as they are called out.
3. Call out for examples of bosses doing things really poorly. Discuss with the class the example, with the intention of determining which law(s) are “in play” by the example. The idea is to have students realize that often bosses are breaking multiple rules at the same time!
4. When students agree on the law(s) that has/have been broken, have the scribe(s) write down the behavior on their sheet of paper.
5. Continue this task until each student has a chance to share an example.

The real payoff comes from the ensuing discussion. Focus the discussion on “what are the outcomes of working in these kinds of situations? By using a laddering technique, the discussion can head either “upstream” to causes (ie, why do you think a boss does this?) or “downstream” (ie, what are the outcomes of having that happen?) In terms of downstream, there are the effects on workers (discouragement/frustration/etc.) that lead to the next step on the ladder: “if this persists, what else is going to happen at that company?” This opens the conversation to a lot of cause and effect relationships, including effects on work behavior, employee turnover, and harm to company performance. At the extreme, sabotage or other revenge actions should not be overlooked.

Repeat this exercise by having a discussion about the things that bosses have done “right”. This time, the facilitator//teacher writes down the kinds of bosses behaviors that are positive. Once students have exhausted their examples, probing questions such as “why don’t all bosses do these things?”, “Are these behaviors that any boss can do?” or, “In what jobs would any of these behaviors not work?” can open the conversation in valuable ways.

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At this time, instructors should shift the focus to the responsibility of the worker. The transition could begin with, “What is the likelihood that you are going to run into a poor boss – or a boss that does some of these things we’ve been talking about?”

Then, ask students what they make of the bulls-eyes. In what ways do the bulls-eyes make sense to them. How would focusing on the bulls-eyes do something positive for them? What would it be?

On a personal level, ask students to “make one of the bulls-eyes their own.” Tell them that some time in the next few weeks you are going to ask them about their personal bulls-eye and whether it is making a difference for them. Then, do it!

Assignment: Interview with a worker (Alternative Teaching Technique)

On the due date of the assignment, the in-class activity can take a number of forms. Here is another effective technique and one that helps your passive or quieter students to be more active in the exercise.

1. At the start of class, write each of the *Laws Of Being Turned Off* on the blackboard (note: you want plenty of space for student examples). Alternatively, put one law on the top of each of 7 flipchart pages that are posted on the walls of the room.
2. Have students work in groups of about 4 students. Have students talk about their examples of bosses doing things poorly. Tell them to determine which law(s) are “in play” by the examples they are sharing. The idea is to have students realize that often bosses are breaking multiple laws at the same time!
3. Once students seem to have exhausted their discussion (5 to 10 minutes), tell each group to go up to the *Laws of Being Turned Off* and have their scribe(s) write down the behaviors next to the appropriate law on the board or paper.

The real payoff comes from the ensuing discussion. As you look at the notes on the board, be sure to ask for clarifications/elaborations since this further involves students and helps other students understand the example. Then, focus the discussion on “what are the outcomes of working in these kinds of situations? By using a laddering technique, the discussion can head either “upstream” to causes (ie, why do you think a boss does this?) or “downstream” (ie, what are the outcomes of having that happen?) In terms of downstream, there are the effects on workers (discouragement/frustration/etc.) that lead to the next step on the ladder: “if this persists, what else is going to happen at that company?” This opens the conversation to a lot of cause and effect relationships, including effects on work behavior, employee turnover, and harm to company performance. At the extreme, sabotage or other revenge actions should not be overlooked.

Repeat this exercise by having a discussion about the things that bosses have done “right”. This time, the facilitator//teacher writes down the kinds of bosses behaviors that are positive. Once students have exhausted their examples, probing questions such as “why don’t all bosses do these things?”, “Are these behaviors that any boss can do?” or, “In what jobs would any of these behaviors not work?” can open the conversation in valuable ways.

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At this time, instructors should shift the focus to the responsibility of the worker. The transition could begin with, “What is the likelihood that you are going to run into a poor boss – or a boss that does some of these things we’ve been talking about?”

The next step could be facilitator led or by having students get back into groups, Then, ask students what they make of the bulls-eyes. In what ways do the bulls-eyes make sense to them. How would focusing on the bulls-eyes do something positive for them? What would it be?

On a personal level, ask students to “make one of the bulls-eyes their own” Tell them that some time in the next few weeks you are going to ask them about their personal bulls-eye and whether it is making a difference for them. Then, do it! Then, ask them to make another...and another...bulls-eye their own.

In-Class Task: Self Reflection as a Worker

Before beginning this assignment, you might want to ask, “I am about to give you an assignment that requires you to think about situations you’ve faced as a worker. Given what you know about “workers” and the book you’ve just read, what positions/jobs might be appropriate for this task?”

Don’t be surprised if this leads students to focus on “blue collar” or “lower level” service jobs at first. Then, press them to think about what are the qualifications of being a “worker”. This should lead to the realization that in any job where there is a boss there are workers, aka, the workers class (those who deal with good or bad bosses). The delineation between bosses and workers helps students realize that these issues are faced throughout one’s career.

Once this is understood, students can approach the task by realizing that every job they’ve ever had applies to this task.

The Task

Have students take anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes in self-reflection and to write down two of the worst bosses actions that they have experienced. They should be asking themselves:

What was a situation where their boss handled something really poorly (it could be a past job or their present job – many people are hesitant to say bad things about present jobs – btw, you could ask students why might this be the case.), where the person found themselves feeling down about themselves, their jobs, and/or were less motivated.

Using a laddering technique, students should ask themselves additional questions such as “why do you think that you responded so well or so badly to the action that their boss had taken?” or, “why do you think your boss did that?” That is, the laddering metaphor relies on the idea that something you just thought about is a step on the ladder toward more (underlying) learning.

If time allows, repeat the task with the best/worst boss actions.

Note: This part of the task could be a take-home task, with students expected to write a short paper (~2 pages). This would give students more time for self-reflection.

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In-Class Task: Self Reflection as a worker (continued)

1. Write each of the *Laws Of Being Turned Off* on the blackboard (note: you want plenty of space for student examples). Alternatively, put one law on the top of each of 7 flipchart pages that are posted around the room.
2. Either handle the writing yourself, or ask students to step up to a posted Law and write down their example that seems to 'best fit' a law then briefly share the experience/
3. Continue this task until each student has a chance to share an example. As the exercise continues, some/many students will mention that their experience fits more than one law – the idea is to have students realize that often bosses are breaking multiple rules at the same time! As this happens, you can have them put a star or checkmark next to additional laws they feel were broken by their example.
4. When students agree on the law(s) that has/have been broken, the real payoff comes from the ensuing discussion. Focus the discussion on “what are the outcomes of working in these kinds of situations? By using a laddering technique, the discussion can head either “upstream” to causes (ie, why do you think a boss does this?) or “downstream” (ie, what are the outcomes of having that happen?) In terms of downstream, there are the effects on workers (discouragement/frustration/etc.) that lead to the next step on the ladder: “if this persists, what else is going to happen at that company?” This opens the conversation to a lot of cause and effect relationships, including effects on work behavior, employee turnover, and harm to company performance. At the extreme, sabotage or other revenge actions can not be overlooked.
5. At this time, instructors should shift the focus to the responsibility of the worker. The transition could begin with, “What is the likelihood that you are going to run into a poor boss – or a boss that does some of these things we’ve been talking about?” Then, ask students what they make of the bulls-eyes. In what ways do the bulls-eyes make sense to them? How would focusing on the bulls-eyes do something positive for them? What would it be?
6. On a personal level, ask students to “make one of the bulls-eyes their own.” Tell them that some time in the next few weeks you are going to ask them about their personal bulls-eye and whether it is making a difference for them. Then, do it! Then, over the course of several months ask them to make another...and another...bulls-eye their own.

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If time allows, repeat this exercise by having a discussion about the things that bosses have done “right”. Begin with having students reflect on one or two situations where their boss handled something really well, where the workers (or just the one student) found themselves feeling good about themselves, their jobs, and/or were more motivated.

This time, the facilitator//teacher writes down the kinds of bosses behaviors that are positive. Once students have exhausted their examples, begin by asking, “Let’s see if we can put these good behaviors into categories. Do you see any similarities in the examples?” Here, you will likely find that the good examples of boss’s behaviors have commonalities. You will also find that these behaviors are usually the opposite of the behaviors in the *Laws of Being Turned Off*.

A consciousness to positive actions is an important step toward internalizing these behaviors! Probe further by asking: “What are the consequences on workers and the company of engaging workers in the ways that are on the board?” Follow this with, “Why don’t all bosses do these things?” and, “Are these behaviors that any boss can do?” and, “In what jobs would any of these behaviors not work?” You can dig deeper depending on the responses that follow. Indeed, these questions will open the conversation in valuable ways.

If the instructor has not already done so, at this time shift the focus to the responsibility of the worker. The transition could begin with, “What is the likelihood that you are going to run into a good boss – or a boss that does some of these things we’ve been talking about?”

Then, ask students what they make of the bulls-eyes. In what ways do the bulls-eyes make sense to them? How would focusing on the bulls-eyes do something positive for them? What would it be?

On a personal level, ask students to “make one of the bulls-eyes their own.” Tell them that some time in the next few weeks you are going to ask them about their personal bulls-eye and whether it is making a difference for them. Then, do it! Then, over the course of several months ask them to make another...and another...bulls-eye their own.

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In-Class Task: Self Reflection as a Boss

Before beginning this assignment, you might want to ask, “I am about to give you an assignment that requires you to think about situations you’ve engaged in as a boss.

The Task

Have students/participants take anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes in self-reflection and to write down two situations where they can visualize how their workers might have felt that one (or more) of the Laws of Being Turned Off had been “in play” by an action they had taken. They should be asking themselves:

What was a situation where, in hindsight, they handled something really poorly, where it was possible – even likely – that the results had been that worker(s) had found themselves feeling down about themselves, their jobs, and/or were less motivated.

Using a laddering technique ¹, students/participants should ask themselves additional questions such as “why did you take the action that led to this likely effect on your workers?” or, “What was it about the situation that made the action seem appropriate at the time?” or, “In looking back, was there any other way that you could have behaved/other actions that you could have taken that would have led to a more positive outcome?”

If time allows, repeat the task with the best boss actions.

Let students/participants discuss their experiences in groups of about 4 or 5. The goal is to realize that as bosses, everyone makes occasional missteps/behaviors that can harm companies. It is useful to have participants in each group “put on the hat of the worker”. Tell the groups that after a member of the group shares the action that they had done they should discuss: “As a worker, you’ve just had your boss do this. What are your thoughts once your boss is out-of-sight?” Then, discuss the short and longer term consequences, if any, that can result from each situation.

Ultimately, the goal is to realize that by understanding the underlying causes of poor boss behaviors (and the consequences on company performance that can follow), bosses can make better choices. Developing a habit of reflection, finding opportunities for improvement, and then taking steps to become a better boss and a better worker is the ultimate payoff.

¹ the laddering metaphor relies on the idea that something you just thought about is a step on the ladder toward more (underlying) learning.

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