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What bosses really want

By Rachel Farrell, Special to CareerBuilder



Most employees want nothing more than to impress their boss. But it's hard to do that when you don't know exactly what bosses want.

Do they want you to check in every day with a status report? Do they want you to come to them only when there's a problem? Do they want you to ask questions, or figure out the answers on your own?

We asked the men and women in charge what they really want from their employees. Here's what they had to say:

"Bosses are busy. At any given moment, they have 10 things that they should have been doing yesterday, which means that bosses want employees that can save them time. They want employees that can make the daily decisions on their own and who have enough initiative to see how something is done the first time and then do it the next time without guidance. Bosses also want employees that are humble and gracious. They want employees that are willing to put the work in, but humble enough to pass the praise along to everyone. Finally, bosses want employees that respect themselves. Employees that respect themselves as well are a joy because they are usually self-confident. This type of attitude prevents mental breakdowns, unnecessary drama, and all of the little stresses that bosses hate dealing with on a daily basis." -- *James Clear, founder of Passive Panda, a business advice website*

"Honest [communication](#). To manage effectively across the organization, acute awareness regarding the interdependency of departments, partnerships, culture and subcultures is critical. Clear communication benefits stakeholders by supplying relevant information in order to ensure their continued buy-in and support. Communication serves to maintain a straightforward understanding of the process to be followed, content of updates, frequency of updates and an assessment of [project management](#) tools employed." -- *Victoria Krayna, founder/CEO, Life-staging by Victoria, a career coaching firm*

"Good bosses want these things from their direct reports: honesty and the [ability to say what] he or she thinks about a proposal or idea; the willingness to disagree without being disagreeable; someone who is pleasant to work with; someone who does what she or he says will get done; and someone who supports an agreed-upon action, even if the person thinks the agreed-upon action is not right." -- *Richard S. Deems, Ph.D., co-author of "Make Job Loss Work for You"*

"They are honest and ethical. They care about doing a good job. They are proactive. They are lifelong learners. They seek to constantly improve. They think long-term." -- *Dave Hatter, Libertas Technologies, a database software company*

"The best employees are motivated, resourceful and conscientious. Without motivation, you have nothing, because nothing starts. Resourcefulness brings innovative thinking to the forefront and helps maintain an edge on the competition while increasing efficiency. Conscientiousness prevents mistakes from happening and repeatedly stands out as a predictor of success on the job. When these three occur [together], success is guaranteed." -- *Lynda Zuege, managing director, The Workforce Consultants*

"There are three main things I look for in a successful team member: an amazing skill set that will help the company move forward, a very high work ethic [and] a pleasant personality. We like to have fun with each other and our clients. While everyone has bad days, a person who's generally pleasant is a major plus for any boss." -- *Shilonda Downing, Virtual Work Team, a temporary-services recruiter*

"Engaged employees who work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward." -- *Maynard Brusman, consulting psychologist and executive coach*

"Team player: If you're not a team player you can't play on my team. Your opinion: I want everyone on the team to have an opinion. Positive attitude: You must have a can-do mentality to remain on our team. Honesty: You must tell me the truth as you know it. Don't back down: If you believe in your idea, sell me and the team on it. Bring solutions: If you bring an issue to the table, bring a solution. Learn to coach: I want my direct reports to coach their subordinates and groom them for advancement. Filter issues: Not every item needs my attention. You need to filter what issues I really need to help address. Get to the point: My time is valuable, so get to the point quickly. Become loyal: I want my team to be loyal to me. If I make a mistake tell me, don't go behind my back and discuss the issue with others." -- *Craig A Fleming, CEO and president, International Artist Management Group Inc.*

"I believe good bosses want three things: transparency, strategic accountability and responsibility." -- *Stacey Hawley, principal, Credo, a career counseling firm*

"For the growth and advancement of the organization, bosses want direct reports who 'own' progress, opportunities or challenges. Successful direct reports understand that with any empowerment or authority comes accountability. Success with regard to that accountability can lead to career success for those team members, and also the organization. Further, in this economy and business environment, bosses must have direct reports who are creative, think outside the box and can then build upon their pride of success while continuing to focus 'outside the tunnel.'" -- *Mike Stengel, vice president of operations, Swank Audio Visuals, which provides rentals and event services*

"It is so much more difficult to manage than supervise. As the CEO, I never want to be told by my direct reports that I have something when I do not. I want to be frankly told when we collectively have a problem. However, I want them to be able to offer at least two to three viable solutions. I want my direct reports to ideally function like true peers. In this mode, I want them to have healthy arguments about potential solutions to problems and vision for what the best direction could be for the organization. I want a direct report to handle his or her own staff with little input from me. I want a direct report to not be afraid to come in my office with an idea that is easily perceived as something that will advance the mission of the organization without a self-serving or obfuscated agenda. Finally, I want a direct report who is loyal to me and to the organization. A person that takes the job and the organization personally. A person that does in fact bring their job home with them and balances the welfare of the organization with their own welfare. I want direct reports eager for new assignments. I never want a direct report with a nanosecond of cynicism. A direct report who complains or is negative or sarcastic about a peer should not complain to me but rather attempt to resolve it with their peer. A great direct report should feel comfortable looking at me almost as their peer. However, the "almost" is there because the direct report should always be developing ways to help me improve myself and obviously the organization." -- *Robert Stack, president and CEO of Community Options, which provides support services to disabled people*

"What bosses want in their direct reports: support, reliability, curiosity, creativity and trust. It is also nice to have direct reports who want to build stronger, more personal relationships with their managers. This doesn't mean they have to be best friends, but stronger personal connections make working together and working through conflicts so much easier to manage." -- *Chris Perry, founder of Career Rocketeer, a job-search firm*

"The best employees, and the only one I'll consider hiring, must have these three traits: passion about what we do, how they can help bring that to market and the difference that they can make. Smarts and leadership ability -- the ability to own your job, influence others and dare to make a difference." -- *Rosaria Hawkins, Ph.D., president, Take Charge Consultants, a leadership development firm*

"We want everyone who works at Grand Circle to be able to lead at a moment's notice, and from anywhere in the organization, but that's only possible if everyone has daily practice taking risks. We encourage that by providing an environment where it is safe to make mistakes, and where important risks are rewarded whether they succeed or not." -- *Alan Lewis, CEO, chairman and co-founder of Grand Circle Corp., a travel company*

"Bosses really want a few things from direct reports. They want people who can use their critical thinking skills to solve a problem. They also look for people who can bring way more in value and great ideas to the table than their worth in terms of salary. So if you're being paid \$50,000 per year, you better be able to bring at least \$50,001 in great ideas and value. The last very important quality is they prefer direct hires who love their jobs. It's been proven time and again that you are a better employee if you are doing something you are passionate about." -- *John Strelecky, life coach and author of "The Why Café"*

"Be ready to show off the value you bring to the organization. Forget what it says on your job description, which was written years ago and never updated. Bosses want to see employees taking initiative and proactively seeking ways to make the business better, acting as leaders to other employees and delivering stellar [client services](#)." -- *Mary Hladio, CEO, Ember Carriers, a leadership development firm*

"There are some characteristics that would appear to be universally desirable: integrity, intelligence and conscientiousness. However, in addition to those universal 'wants,' the boss also wants the employee to take the time to understand who the boss is. The boss expects the employee to understand the boss's individual goals and objectives and the context in which the boss operates. The boss expects the employee to identify the boss's strengths, weaknesses, needs and working style preferences, and attempt to accommodate them. A good boss will try to communicate those explicitly to the employee. A great boss will try to accommodate the employee's goals and needs as well. But all bosses will want their employees to figure out how to apply their individual skills and abilities to help their boss do their job better and accomplish their goals." -- *David Prottas, assistant professor, School of Business, Adelphi University*

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