

***Super*boss**

**The A-Z of
managing people
successfully**

David Freemantle

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Gower

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DF

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Introduction

You too can be a Superboss. Once you've dipped into this book you'll probably realise you're almost one already.

A lot of people have made a lot of money over the last thirty years or so developing and expounding the idea that to be an effective manager you need to pass psychometric tests, go through assessment centres, attend high-level management training courses and business schools, and, what is worse, even read books on management!

Furthermore over the same period a myth has been perpetrated by the so-called personnel professionals that the only way to manage people is to leave it to them and the unions. The combined efforts of personnel specialists and unions have frequently created a buffer between the boss and his or her people.

But the Superboss doesn't let this stand in the way of managing people successfully. He doesn't hide behind excuses such as the lack of clear personnel policy. You will never hear the Superboss saying, for example: 'How can I do a good management job? This company has no career development policy, it doesn't invest in training, and employee relations issues are always dealt with up in Personnel.'

The Superboss knows what he has to achieve and sets out to achieve it, overcoming any obstacles put in his way. The Superboss knows how to get his people to support him, irrespective of whether the Chief Executive is crazy, the Vice-President Finance incompetent, or his immediate boss plain bloody ignorant.

The Superboss doesn't spend his time looking for excuses. He puts up with all the inadequacies of his highly imperfect company and buckles down and does a good job, taking his people with him.

The Superboss has learnt a great deal about people. For a start he knows that his own boss is far from perfect and therefore needs a lot of help. He has learnt about how people behave, what they respect, what they want. He hasn't learnt this by going to school, but by continually questioning his own experience, learning from his own mistakes.

The Superboss has learnt that the main determinant in motivating his people is his own relationship with them. As a result he invests a substantial proportion of his time in genuinely

developing these relationships. He knows that his staff will judge him by every word he says, every memo he writes, every action he takes and every decision he makes.

He knows that he needs to be totally consistent in his approach. In fact he knows that it is his behaviour, his attitudes, his decisions which will make or break his team – not the behaviour, attitudes and decisions of senior executives way above, nor the behaviour, attitudes and decisions of union officials or those of the Personnel Department or Finance.

The Superboss knows that the prime factor in his team's motivation and performance is himself, the boss. He will achieve in any circumstances. Over a period of time, the Superboss has developed an extensive range of successful management practices which he knows will lead to maximum team motivation and performance. These do not derive from employee relations strategies, personnel policies or directives handed down from above. They are actually to do with what a Superboss does, minute by minute, hour by hour, to maintain and develop the motivation and performance of his total team.

More often than not these management practices are straightforward common sense, a fact often obscured by writers and lecturers on management.

This book attempts to set out an "A to Z" of essential practices for managing people successfully, an "A to Z" of what a manager should actually do to become a Superboss.

The Superboss can just as well be the Chief Executive of an airline as the supervisor in charge of the switchboard or the Production Manager in Factory 2. The Superboss can be anyone responsible for supervising, managing or directing people, whether they number 10, 100 or 10,000.

And of course the Superboss can be male or female. In the text, for simplicity's sake, I have used 'he' and 'him' to stand for 'he or she' and 'him or her'.

This book is intended not to be read from cover to cover, but 'dipped into', perhaps on a page-a-day basis. It is meant to provide, for anyone concerned with managerial excellence, a guide to the action you as a manager can take today towards achieving this and becoming a Superboss.

Once you've dipped into the book a number of times it will be clear that underlying all the entries is a consistent philosophy as to what constitutes successful people management.

As an aspiring Superboss you don't need to wait for the company to enrol you on the next management training course. Start today by putting into practice what you read in this book.

It won't be long before you're a Superboss!

Accountability

Accountability is knowing what you'll get fired for.

The Superboss goes out of his way to make sure he is 100 per cent clear about his accountabilities. He knows what decisions he can make, he knows how to delegate accountability and get members of his team to make decisions.

Whoever makes a decision carries the buck – must be held accountable after the event. Which is why, in poorly-run companies, people try to pass the buck and why inefficient decision-stifling bureaucracies build up. In such companies issues requiring decisions eddy around in a swirling sea of bureaucracy, committees and upward delegation. The issue will eventually surface with some high-up person who will be forced to say yes or no. That person will then be criticised furiously behind his or her back for making the wrong decision, the critics being the very same people who passed the buck up in the first place.

The Superboss has nothing of this. He'll make a decision and carry the can. If he's unclear whether it's his decision or not he'll either check with his boss or preferably take a flyer and make the decision himself. The Superboss has learnt that the best way of clarifying grey accountability areas is to make decisions and wait until someone challenges him. That's his opportunity formally to clarify the accountability.

Of course, the Superboss knows that if he makes more than one bad decision he might get fired. Being accountable takes guts!

ACTION TODAY

Sit down today and clarify your own levels of accountability. Make sure you know what business decisions you can make. Better still, make a list of those unresolved issues and start making some decisions; you can account to your boss later. Discuss accountability with your team. Take them out for a drink after work and charge it to the company. See who challenges your decision and then account for that decision.

If you're dissatisfied that you can't authorise travel, recruitment, training and basic expenditure, go and discuss it with your boss and ensure you are fully clear about your accountabilities when you leave the meeting.

Confirm today that the company is holding you accountable for production levels, sales targets, engineering performance, distribution deadlines, cost-effective administration or whatever is your line of management.

You need to know today that you are being held accountable for the success of your department, or the failure. If you don't know the difference between success and failure in your area you should resign immediately – either you have an impossible job, or you are an impossible buck-passer.

It starts with you, find out! To be able to manage you must be accountable.

REMEMBER

You are a **SUPERBOSS** if you can make decisions and account for them.

Achievement

Achievement is what management is all about.

It's horrifying to interview so many managers who are unable to summarise what they've achieved in their career to date. Some talk about promotion as an achievement. Yes, for them personally. But, I ask, what have they achieved for the company? Then many get lost. Some talk about their skills, or their hard work, or what they actually do, week by week.

Achievement is the bench-mark for the Superboss. It is what he has personally contributed, apart from every other manager, to the profitability and success of the company. It's his track record and he's proud of it.

His achievements, which he'll measure either quantitatively or qualitatively, might include the successful introduction of a new product, or efficiency improvements in the loading bay, or a one per cent reduction in labour turnover, or recruiting into the company some of the country's top graduates, or consistent on-time delivery for twelve months, or a reduction in the number of customer complaints from his predecessor's level, or saving the company considerable expenditure by improving the administration.

The Superboss knows that he must achieve to be of any value to the organisation. Even routine management functions present achievement opportunities for the Superboss, he will raise standards of housekeeping and output quality (whether that output be a car component or a response to a customer request).

ACTION TODAY

Draft out your career resumé including a summary of your greatest achievements over recent years. If you are unable to identify recent achievements you should be leaving the company before a Superboss catches up with you.

REMEMBER

Achievement differentiates the SUPERBOSS from the 'manager ordinaire'.

Action

Action is the language of commitment, it speaks louder than words.

We've all experienced it. The situation where someone says something will be done and it isn't. The sales manager who promises to ring you but doesn't, the service manager who promises to look into your gearbox problem but doesn't, the employee relations specialist who promises to send you a copy of the standard contract of employment, but doesn't.

There's the manager who is always telling you it's someone else's problem. 'I can't sort out the scheduling', the production manager will tell you, 'you'd better see planning'.

The Superboss will take action, he'll speak to planning on your behalf. If the Superboss says he'll arrange for a copy of the employment contract to be sent to you, he'll take action, it will be sent to you. If the Superboss promises to send someone to look into your gearbox problem, he'll take action and send someone.

When the Superboss decides to help you he's committing himself to take action. When you take a problem to him and ask for help he assumes that's what you want. He won't refer you to another manager. He won't shrug his shoulders and say 'What can I do?' He won't forget two minutes later what he said. He'll do something about your problem. He'll make a note of the agreed action, and then he'll do what he said he'd do.

If there's a problem his team are struggling with, he'll take action to help. He'll step in and ring the chief executive of Mossley's when his team are struggling to obtain supplies from them. He'll see the financial director when the purchasing manager receives continual complaints from Mossley's about excessive delays in payments.

When Lucy Wight asks for five minutes to complain that Public Affairs seems to be blocking her transfer, the Superboss will take immediate action and ring Public Affairs to find out why.

When his boss comes in and mentions that at a dinner last night the president of one of their major customers made some confused comment about service delays, the Superboss will take action. He'll examine the problem and have a report on his boss's desk before the day is out.

The Superboss will always take action.

ACTION TODAY

Take some positive action on every single problem that comes your way. Don't leave it till tomorrow, don't pass it up to your boss, don't leave it for one of your colleagues.

Take action and get the problem fixed, whatever it is. If you see the problem, it's your problem. So take action.

REMEMBER

You will always see a SUPERBOSS where the action is.

Advice

How can a manager function without advice?

It's not easy to give advice, let alone take it. Certain managers I've met become defensive whenever you offer it. It's as if the process of accepting advice is a process of admitting your own ignorance, exposing your own inadequacies.

Other more assertive managers develop 'barriers against advice'. They assume an arrogant facade of a thousand answers, appearing to know everything. They will shake their head, frown and cut you short if you so much as dare to offer advice.

The managers who resist advice normally get their comeuppance when there's an organisation change, or a new boss comes in.

The Superboss will give advice, and he'll take it. If he's not in a position to give it, he'll advise where to go for it. His advice is always aimed at helping a person, whether it be to resolve a problem, or improve performance or whatever. In rendering advice his motives are always honourable, never Machiavellian nor political.

His advice is not always solicited. You might see the Superboss take Ben Giovanni by the elbow to give some gentle advice about not 'mouthing off' in front of others. Or when Neil Bloch comes up for a signature he might say: 'Sit down Neil, there's some advice I want to give you ...'

On the other hand the Superboss is always taking advice, from his team, from his boss, from his colleagues. If the decision he should make is not perfectly clear he'll seek advice: 'Now Neil, perhaps you'll give *me* some advice. If you were in my shoes what would you do about this problem with allowances ...?'

ACTION TODAY

Take advice. Spend your whole day seeking advice from people around you about your three biggest problems. Listen carefully and don't shoot them down if they make crazy suggestions. You don't have to accept their advice, but try very hard to. After all, one or two of them might be in your shoes tomorrow, and even doing a better job than you.

REMEMBER

If you want to be a SUPERBOSS, take advice from one.