

What Does Your Boss **REALLY** Want From YOU?



**15 TRAITS
MANAGERS
VALUE
MOST**

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What Does Your Boss REALLY Want From YOU?

15 Traits Managers Value Most

Managers, like anyone else, can have differences of opinion. However, ask them to identify common employee traits that they value most and they seem to have a common voice – regardless of field or industry.

If your aspirations are to climb the career ladder, have a better relationship with your boss, or become a valued team member, the information in this guide can help you. Here are the top 15 traits that managers value most along with insight into why they are important.

Trait #1: Integrity

While integrity is akin to honesty, it is not the same thing. Integrity is all about following your moral compass. Honesty is about admitting when you haven't done so.

For managers the number one trait by far is integrity. As one manager put it, "Integrity is the most important trait that I value in an employee. Anything less in this profession destroys your credibility with customers and coworkers."

Leaders view integrity as a critical factor because:

- Employees with integrity use this quality as an inner guide to consistently make good choices, display a strong work ethic, and demonstrate trustworthiness.
- Managers presume that with integrity comes honesty and, at the end of the day, honest employees will do the right thing, even when nobody is watching.
- Employees who demonstrate integrity can be trusted, especially on critical, high-visibility projects.

Does your boss sometimes confuse you? Have you ever wondered what he or she REALLY wants from you?

We asked hundreds of managers which traits they admire most in their employees – and these are the 15 traits that they said mattered most.

So, next time you're pondering, "What does my boss really want from me?" – you may very well find the answer on this list!

Maintaining a high level of integrity isn't always easy. It means not compromising your principles regardless of the situation. However, first you need to have a clear understanding of your values and beliefs. That means doing a little self-assessment.

Consider this scenario: Tim and Darryl are supervisors for the same company, but with very different styles. When Tim's team completes a project, he acknowledges their hard work and praises them to his manager. On the other hand, Darryl never singles out his star performers and has even been known to take credit for their work. If errors are made or deadlines missed, Tim works with his team to find solutions, whereas Darryl points fingers and bad-mouths his staff.

When you consider these two supervisors, ask yourself:

- Who best exemplifies integrity?
- Whom would I rather have as a boss?
- Whom would I rather model myself after?

In the end, “. . . a person who has integrity will possess other valuable traits as well. Without integrity, the rest is just show.”

Trait #2: Initiative

Initiative is all about doing something without being asked. Employees with initiative are motivated to work hard, work smart, and do what is necessary to help themselves and their team be successful. They seek answers to questions and solutions to problems.

“I am most impressed by the one who does not hesitate to jump in to figure it out . . . too many employees want a blueprint before they even try,” suggests one manager.

Employees with a high level of initiative:

- Act independently without being told what to do.
- Never say, “I don't know.” They say, “I'll find out.”
- Systematically break down problems and consider alternatives.
- Never present a problem without offering at least one solution.

Managers aren't there to solve all your problems. That doesn't mean they aren't there to help you work through new or difficult situations or that you should take on more than you can handle. However, the point is to act without always being told what to do.



Ultimately, managers will tell you, “I appreciate employees who take the initiative to discover the problems and actually work to come up with a plan of their own to resolve them.”

Trait #3: Team Player

Since organizations frequently are described as a group of people working cooperatively together to achieve the same goal, sometimes employees automatically think they are team players by virtue of the fact that they work with others.

However, being a true team player takes more than just being on the team. It means you:

- Work toward cooperation rather than confrontation.
- Are reliable, dependable, and flexible.
- Actively participate.
- Speak and listen with respect.
- Show commitment to the team.

As one manager put it, “Being a team player and active listener and working collectively as a group is essential.” Team players understand the benefits of working collectively. Working as part of a team allows you to learn from others, brainstorm to resolve problems, and receive support.

Consider this scenario: Jesse is in a department meeting when the manager starts talking about a new process for distributing mail. A secretary complains that it will take more time to process mail accurately for the large department and this will negatively affect her job. Jesse offers to create a checklist for sending and receiving mail that can work as a job aid for the entire department, until everyone has the process down, which will take the responsibility and burden off the secretary.

Ask yourself:

- Who is the team player in this scenario?
- Whom would you rather have on your team?
- Do you work with people like this?

Ask a manager what she thinks about the importance of teamwork, and she might say, “The employees I value the most are employees who are honest, hardworking, and team players. The employee who has positive compliments regarding their coworkers is top-notch.”

“The way the team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don’t play together, the club won’t be worth a dime.”

– Babe Ruth

Trait #4: Open to New Ideas

When you are open to new ideas, you are willing to listen and consider alternatives. Having an open mind allows you to explore all options. When you have more options, you have a better chance of choosing the best solution.

One manager offers this view: “The ability to see both sides of an issue is appreciated. It seems that almost anything can be taught or explained when someone is willing to listen to all sides before judging a situation.”

Ask yourself:

- Are you willing to consider someone else’s opinion or point of view?
- Can you look at the facts and analyze them without bias?
- Is it OK if you are not “right” all the time?

Consider, too, that keeping an open mind demonstrates flexibility. Flexibility in thinking is critical to good problem solving.

Consider this scenario: In 1968, Dr. Spencer Silver, a chemist at 3M, developed a reusable, pressure-sensitive adhesive. For the next five years, he tried to promote his invention within 3M with no luck. It wasn’t until 1974 that a colleague named Art Fry decided to use Dr. Silver’s adhesive to anchor the bookmark in his book. In April 1980, the product debuted in U.S. stores as “Post-it Notes.”

It’s not always easy to step back and consider your position on a matter. Ego often gets in the way. But consider this manager’s wise words: “An openness to comments and suggestions, willingness and eagerness to learn, and ‘coachability’ ... are valued traits.”

Trait #5: Embraces Change

Writer Frank Kafka wrote, “In a fight between you and the world, bet on the world.”

Whether or not you have noticed it, the world is an ever-changing place. That means, like it or not, you need to be willing to adapt and make adjustments. When you do, you find new ways of thinking and working. And you become willing to change.

As difficult as change might be, employees and organizations that don’t want to change will quickly become extinct. “Most people don’t like change and will fight it to the bitter end. But they don’t realize if we don’t keep up with the changes, we will be left in the dust!”

“Ideas can be life-changing. Sometimes all you need to open the door is just one more good idea.”

– Jim Rohn

A person who embraces change:

- Acts like a beginner. If you think you are an expert, you will merely look for confirmation of what you already know.
- Is flexible and adaptable. With change comes ambiguity and uncertainty.
- Continuously cultivates their curiosity. Ask, Why and how?
- Learns in multiple ways. Read, listen, try it out, observe, ask a mentor, and teach others.

Change is inevitable. You cannot ignore it, wish it away, or even outrun it, so you better turn and embrace it. As a wise manager once said, “I value most an employee who is willing to try. I believe if one is willing to try, great things can happen.”

Trait #6: Accountable

Don't confuse responsibility with accountability. Here is one of the best ways to differentiate these two words:

Responsibility is about ownership of a project, a problem, or an assignment. *Accountability* is about being held for the consequences of the outcome of the project, the problem, or the assignment.

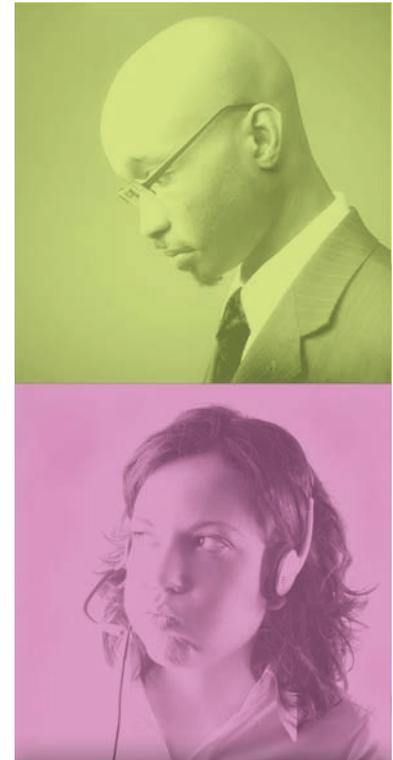
While you might be responsible for completing a project, the accountability for its success may lie with your boss. He or she trained you, gave you direction, and provided the tools.

You can understand why this trait is one that many managers value. For them, employees who aren't only responsible for a project, but are accountable for its outcome, are more invested in the goal itself and have higher personal satisfaction with the results.

From a manager's perspective, accountability means an employee:

- Can be counted on to own and correct any mistakes that may occur
- Will not seek blame nor wait for directives when something unexpected happens
- Feels responsible for the quality of the work he or she produces

In the end, “. . . accountability benefits the department and coworkers and maintains all-around good relations with everyone involved in day-to-day operations.”



Trait #7: Quality Work

Quality, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Some managers see it merely as the absence of defects or mistakes, while others believe it is all about the details. As one manager remarked,

“... the trait I value most is someone who is detail oriented. If you have an employee who pays attention to the littlest details, then you have an employee who cares about the job they are doing.”

Consider this scenario: Sharon and Mary work in the call center of a large insurance company. When Sharon answers the phone, she sometimes takes longer to answer questions and find the information callers want. However, she frequently receives compliments because of the “smile in her voice.” Mary, on the other hand, prefers to get on and off the phone as quickly as possible. She is fast and accurate and generally handles more calls than other workers handle. However, she tends to be curt and rarely receives compliments.

Keep in mind that they both get the job done. However, under the circumstances:

- Whom would you rather call?
- Who better exemplifies quality?
- Who are you more like?

For many managers, “Commitment to doing their job to the best of their ability – no matter what that is,” is the simplest definition of quality work. For employees, that means knowing and meeting your boss’s expectations.

Trait #8: Dependable

Dependability is a fundamental component of successful employees. It means your supervisor and coworkers can rely on you to:

- Come to work each day and be there on time.
- Complete your work to the best of your ability.
- Meet your deadlines.
- Return phone calls and emails promptly.
- Consistently comply with company policies.

Just as you depend on others to do what they say they will, your supervisor looks to you for the same reason. Being dependable means being consistent. Dependability is like pregnancy; you can’t be “kind of” or “mostly” dependable. Either you are or you aren’t.

“Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.”

– William Foster

Ask yourself:

- Who is the most dependable person I know?
- What actions does this person take that make me feel he or she is dependable?
- How do I compare?

Consider this scenario: Pauline and Dave are account representatives. They are equal in their ability to do their job and both are well-liked. Pauline has been with the company about a year. She always arrives on time and is attentive in staff meetings and professional in her interactions. Dave, on the other hand, has been with the firm six years. He is routinely late and frequently calls in sick. He's known as the clown of the department.

The company just landed a new account and Pauline and Dave's supervisor has to assign it to one of them. Who do you think should get the new account?

Trait #9: Problem Solver

Problem solving is a skill you use every day in every aspect of your life, from making simple decisions about what to wear to work or eat for breakfast to how you will fill a customer's order by the deadline.

According to Ken Watanabe, author of *Problem-Solving 101*, "It's important to realize that being a problem solver isn't just an ability; it's a whole mind-set, one that drives people to bring out the best in themselves and to shape the world in a positive way."

What frequently happens when faced with a problem is that employees go to someone else – like their boss – for a solution, instead of looking for the answer themselves. Problem solvers, on the other hand, learn to identify the source of the problem and potential solutions. Then when they approach their supervisor for assistance, they can present the issue and offer ways of how they might resolve it.

Consider this scenario: Your team is responsible for the company's summer picnic. There are more than 500 people coming to the event. An hour before, you learn that the truck bringing beverages broke down. How would you solve this problem and save the company picnic?

If you want to kick your problem-solving skills into high gear, don't just solve a problem, eliminate it. Come up with a way to prevent the problem from recurring.

"There's no use talking about the problem unless you talk about the solution."

– Betty Williams

Trait #10: Self-Motivated

Motivation is the force that continually pushes you to move toward your goal. It can come from outside you, such as financial reward, recognition, or a desire for status; or it can come from within you, where the reward is the behavior itself.

Self-motivated employees want to be competent and enjoy acting independently. They rarely need someone to tell them the right thing to do. Self-motivation is about your belief in yourself and your ability to achieve.

Experts suggest these four factors to build self-motivation:

1. Self-confidence
2. Positive thinking
3. Focus on goal
4. Supportive environment

When employees are self-motivated employers benefit. Self-motivated employees work hard and accomplish much because that is what they want to do.

Trait #11: Positive Attitude

If you have ever worked with a grumpy person, you know the importance of a positive attitude. It makes the work environment so much more enjoyable. Consider that a positive attitude at work can:

- Reduce your stress.
- Lift the spirit of others.
- Create a better work environment.
- Draw people to you.
- Improve job security.
- Just like a smile, positive attitudes are infectious. People with a positive attitude:
- Refuse to participate in negative conversations.
- Focus on overcoming problems, not creating them.
- Are a magnet for others who are interested in a better work environment.

A positive attitude in the workplace can make an amazing difference. Commit to having an optimistic approach to all encounters.

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.”

– Winston Churchill

Trait #12: Efficient

Sometimes people confuse efficiency with productivity. While they do go hand-in-hand, efficient employees are productive without waste. They work smarter, not harder, to get desired results. The benefit to employers is that when employees work efficiently, the company operates efficiently.

Efficient employees:

- Are proficient in the skills and knowledge required to do their job.
- Give their all each day and make few mistakes.
- Follow best practices for accomplishing their work.
- Use time management skills to meet deadlines.
- Take ownership of their duties and goals.

At the restaurant chain Subway, they train each employee on how to make a sandwich quickly, with a different employee handling each part of the sandwich. Consider how to approach your work in a similar manner. Break your workflow down into bite-sized pieces and refine each one to take the least amount of time possible.

Trait #13: Strong Communication

Too often, when people think of communication skills they only consider someone's ability to speak. However, communication involves listening and writing skills as well. Ultimately, communication is about conveying ideas, whether you do it as part of a presentation, write it in an email, casually discuss an idea with your boss, or use another method.

Strong written and oral communication skills:

- Are an essential component of most careers
- Make you more competitive, promotable, and productive
- Are frequently linked to individuals with strong interpersonal skills
- Enable employees to work well on teams, assist customers, negotiate issues, conduct meetings, and resolve conflicts

As one manager explains it, "... effective communication skills are critical, and establishing and maintaining the lines of communication are very important."

*"Communication
- the human
connection - is
the key to
personal and
career success."*

- Paul Meyer

To be an effective communicator:

- Make your method of communication appropriate to your message.
- Understand that what you say and how you say it matters.
- Take every opportunity to improve your communication skills.

The purpose of communication is to relay your message as clearly and unambiguously as possible. It is only successful when the sender and receiver understand the same information.

Trait #14: Resourcefulness

Can you repair anything with a roll of duct tape, a paper clip, and a drinking straw? If you answered “yes,” you are resourceful. Resourcefulness is all about having the ability to jump in and solve problems regardless of the resources available to you. Some people call it inventiveness, others suggest it’s creativity, and some like to call it McGyverness.

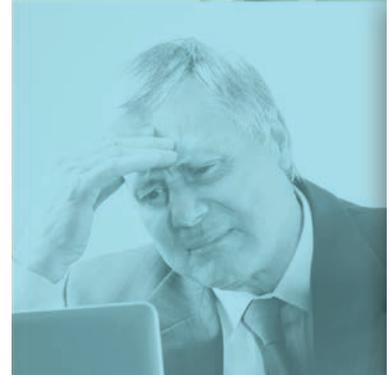
When confronted with a situation, resourceful employees ask themselves:

- Is this the best way or is there another option?
- Who can I speak to who might have some insight?
- Has anything been done before that might work?
- How can I optimize what I have to work with?

Resourceful employees also tend to use their initiative and problem-solving skills. They have the ability to access and use information that is available to them. Resourceful employees:

- Consider how to use their time wisely.
- Improve upon their responsibilities.
- Draw on resources to solve problems.
- Find ways around obstacles.
- Make better outcomes.

Consider this scenario: It’s your first day at a new company. They’ve assigned a work buddy to show you the ropes, but she just called to say she’s running late and won’t be in for another hour. What do you do?



Trait #15: Hardworking

Also known as diligent, industrious, and dedicated, many employers consider hard workers to be the backbone of the organization. No one gets anywhere without working hard, regardless of the level of their talent. As one supervisor said, "... a hardworking attitude about the job ... taking the good along with the bad ... makes assigning projects so much easier."

Hard workers are:

- Generous with their time and talents
- Willing to work until the job is done
- Focused on quality as well as quantity
- Not afraid to do what it takes to succeed

Keep in mind, the harder you work, the better you look in the eyes of your supervisor.



So, there you have it – the 15 traits and habits managers value most:

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Integrity | 9. Problem Solver |
| 2. Initiative | 10. Self-Motivated |
| 3. Team Player | 11. Positive Attitude |
| 4. Open to New Ideas | 12. Efficient |
| 5. Embraces Change | 13. Strong Communication |
| 6. Accountable | 14. Resourcefulness |
| 7. Quality Work | 15. Hardworking |
| 8. Dependable | |

It's time to ask yourself, "Where do I rate on each of these traits? How can I 'step up' my game? What changes can I make now that might make the most impact?"

Ultimately, cultivating your best traits is about knowing yourself. Focus your efforts on building your strengths and overcoming your weaknesses, and you'll eventually be able to develop these 15 traits that managers value the most.

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