

Some rep firm bosses need to look in the mirror

Have you ever worked for a rep firm/agency boss who didn't have a clue how he or she affected the people around them? You know, the one who yells at team members, ignores them, or constantly tells them what to do, and thinks motivation consists of a chart comparing sales performances. How could they not recognize that their methods lead to low numbers and an apathetic staff?

Some recent research proposes that they can't help themselves — they just aren't aware that they are being jerks. In a recent article by Julia Kirby, senior editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, it explains why this is. Julia discusses the studies of apes and monkeys, which reveal that when a group is threatened, the subordinates look obsessively toward the group leader, watching for indications of how to respond. Even in times of relative calm, baboons do a visual check of their alpha-male two or three times per minute.

However, the alpha does not return the attention. Humans have evolved a bit beyond the need to check on the boss every 20 seconds, but the basic phenomenon remains that subordinates study the behavior of bosses far more closely than bosses study subordinates. For instance, secretaries know much more about their bosses, much like graduate students know more about their advisers.

The article also quotes Princeton psychologist Susan Fiske, who suggests that, like our fellow primates, "People pay attention to those who control their outcomes. In an effort to predict and possibly influence what is going to happen to them, people gather information about those with power."

The best rep firm bosses realize that they are in the limelight and that they can suffer blind spots about themselves and their organizations. Here are three methods I've seen good rep firm bosses use to become more mindful of their impact.

1. They take the blinders off.

All human beings suffer from "self-enhancement bias," believing that they are better than their fellow travelers and have a hard

time accepting any evidence to the contrary.

Team members, superiors and customers consistently provide better information than the boss about his or her own strengths, weaknesses and quirks. The *Harvard Business Review* article noted the results of a study of naval officers, in which peers more successfully predicted which officers would receive early promotions than the officers predicted in their own self-evaluations.

Good rep firm bosses ask those around them about their performance.

2. They find ways to be in-tune with the people they lead.

Effective rep firm bosses devote real energy to reading expressions, noting behaviors and helping their people think independently and express themselves freely.

Especially in troubled times, good bosses realize that their people are looking for them more and more for compassionate help in predicting events, understanding what's going on and gaining control over the outcomes.

Good rep firm bosses regularly ask, "How can I do better?" or "What can I do to be a better leader of this group?"

Then they listen to the answers and act on the suggestions.

3. They understand that exhaustion contributes to behaving like a jerk.

It's a badge of honor to say: "I'm so busy," or "I worked all weekend."

I see people eating unhealthy breakfasts and lunches at their desks or not eating at all. Not taking care of yourself can lead to exhaustion with all kinds of unintended results, including how you treat others at work.

If you need a tune-up, or a complete overhaul, find a buddy to partner with so that you can elevate both your health and your interactions with others.

Talk back: What are your thoughts? What are the signs of a rep firm boss in-tune with reality? Alternatively, what are the signs of a boss still living in a fool's paradise?



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