



Ask an Expert
Steve Strauss

Ask an Expert: Tony Soprano was a really bad boss

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By Steve Strauss, Special for USA TODAY

Q: Steve: What do you think makes for a bad boss? — Gail

A: I've been waiting to answer this question for a while, and the time has finally arrived. Tonight offers one of those special moments that allow me to combine my love of small business with my penchant for marking pop culture touch points, to wit:

Among his other failings, Tony Soprano was a really bad boss.

As of the time of this writing, I do not know the fate of our erstwhile favorite family mobster, but this I do know: Not only was Tony a lousy therapy patient (he tried, but had few insights of note), a crappy husband (alas, poor Carm), not the best of fathers (though A.J. was no picnic either), not a very nice sibling (not that Janice was much better), but most of all, he was a mediocre small business person and a worse boss.

First off, he was a bully, which is sort of funny to even write as his job was to be a bully. But from a purely managerial perspective, he was too loud, mean, and abrasive. There are two ways essentially to motivate your staff: With a carrot or a stick (although in Tony's case, the stick was literal). Relying too heavily on threats, fear and intimidation, Tony was unable to engender any real loyalty among his crew because they resented him as much as they respected him.

As a manager, you have to be able to ride that fine line between rewards and punishment. Too much stick and too little carrot can get you whacked in the workplace, metaphorically speaking of course.

Tony was also a terrible communicator, and I'm not talking about his need to meet in basements or talk in code on cellphones; those requirements come with the gig. Rather, as a boss, Tony never seemed to be able to say what was on his mind or what he wanted done.

Like too many bosses, he seemed to think his crew should have been able to read his mind, and when they couldn't or didn't, Bada Bing! Telling Steve Van Zandt, a.k.a. Silvio Dante, "you handle dat problem dere" didn't quite cut it. Good bosses let you know what they expect of you and then trust you to do it. Tony Soprano did neither.

Tony was even bad at the one part of his job that should have been easy, namely nepotism. I mean really, if there is one thing that the Soprano gang should have been assured of, it was that Tony was going to favor his real family over, well, the family. But Tony didn't even get that right.

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Sure, he had reason to mistrust Christopher, what with his boozing and snorting and murdering and all, but Tony never really supported Christopher. Whether it was Christopher's desire to become a screenwriter or his feud with Paulie Walnuts, that he was Tony's nephew never seemed to really make a difference when, ahem, push came to shove. (And smothering him after a car accident? Now that's just uncalled for!)

Good bosses trust and reward their most important, loyal employees. Christopher was nothing is not loyal.

In a recent Gallup poll, the No. 1 reason employees gave for quitting a job was having a boss not unlike Tony Soprano, that is, a bad boss. So just what does that mean? While researching their book *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em*, authors Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans conducted an unscientific online poll to see which boss behaviors were considered the worst. The results:

1. Belittling people in front of others (40.5%)
2. Lying (34.2%)
3. Being condescending (31.5%)
4. Humiliating and embarrassing others (23.9%)
5. Micromanaging (21.9%)

It is pretty safe to assume whether you asked Paulie (gonna' miss that hair!) Bobby, Junior, or Silvio, the answer would have been the same: Tony was guilty of all of these, save micromanaging.

So let's learn a lesson from Tony Soprano. When it comes to managing your own crew, whatever he would have done, do the opposite.

Today's tip: According to the website badbossology, 48% of employees would fire their boss if they could, 29% would have their boss examined by a shrink, and 23% thought their boss needed additional training.

Ask an Expert appears Mondays. You can e-mail Steve Strauss at: sstrauss@mrallbiz.com. And you can [click here](#) to see previous columns. Steven D. Strauss is a lawyer, author and speaker who specializes in small business and entrepreneurship. His latest book is *The Small Business Bible*. You can sign up for his free newsletter, "Small Business Success Secrets!" at his website —www.mrallbiz.com.

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