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AT WORK

Being a good boss requires effort, skill

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People are riled up at work these days, more on edge. And it's not just the questionable accounting practices setting them off.

So I conducted a non-scientific poll, asking, "Have you become more frustrated and angry at work in the last year?" Everyone who responded said "yes." Fifty percent said it was because they have idiots for bosses.

People were also angrier because their co-workers frustrated them, they worked too much or they felt out of control with little hope for the future. A smaller percentage said they get angry because their clients or customers drive them crazy or because their company's expectations are unrealistic.

But "idiot bosses" won the prize. So what does it take to qualify as an idiot boss? "One who doesn't have a clue as to how to do his job," said one worker.

"Being insensitive to people around them," complained several people.

Examples of insensitivity include "a boss who berates you in front of others to exert his own power," as described by an employee of a medium-size company.

Simply bestowing the title of supervisor, manager or owner on someone doesn't make them qualified to lead others. You need to work at being an effective boss.

Unfortunately, some companies don't make training a priority. They may even support bad behavior, as long as the manager is technically smart. One executive told me recently that he didn't care if people liked one of his managers or not, as long as the manager was getting results. What he doesn't realize is that when people aren't motivated, the results will most likely be short-lived.

Other times, companies just don't understand what it takes to help people become good bosses and leaders. This includes stating clearly what kind of behavior — not just performance — is expected and giving sustained support to good behavior. In many companies this doesn't happen.

People simply don't magically go from being marginal to excellent without help. "I have not yet witnessed a spontaneous recovery from incompetence," says Susan Scott, author of "Fierce Conversations."

Instead of focusing on the people who run the day-to-day businesses, the spotlight is on the boards of directors. And now that all eyes are on the legal liability of the board, companies are looking at how to help directors and officers do their job better.