

# Looking for a Good Boss

## A Guide for Staff

The boss you work for is going to have a significant impact on your work experience and the development you will enjoy in a role. Often when we search for a new role we think more about the role and the organisation than the manager we will work for. Yet your manager will have most impact on the experience you are about to have. This is especially important for young people who might not appreciate the importance of their manager (until they work for a poor boss).

Use the job interview to find out the information you need to make an assessment of what your manager will be like to work for and whether the manager will be active in your development. Make sure the interview is not just an assessment of you.

What do you look for in a prospective boss when you are considering a job?

Here is a checklist to help you cut through any rhetoric and get to the truth of how a manager is likely to treat you when you start working for them. The manager is likely to treat you similarly to how they have treated others. So, the idea is to seek information that gives you a picture of how they have supported other people who have worked for them.

Ask the following types of questions to gain the useful information you need to make an informed decision about the boss you might be working for.

1. I'm really interested to hear about the young people who have worked with you over the last couple of years. Can you tell me about them, and where are they now?
2. Can you tell me about their development?
3. What work assignments have young people had in their first six months of work?
4. What development and training experiences have your young people had over the last year?
5. Do you have a staff development program? What is your role in that program?
6. Have you ever had a staff opinion survey? What were the results?
7. Do you mind if I talk to young people on your team about the development they have had and what sort of experience I am likely to get here?

Below we have examples of “good” and “bad” answers a manager might give to these questions.

The key thing about the discussion that these questions generate is that the manager can not avoid giving useful information. Even if the manager answering the questions is evasive, then that’s providing you good information in itself!

You might be thinking that the questions are a bit too direct for a young person to ask in an interview, and that you don’t want to “turn the interviewer off” in the interview. The way around this is to ask the questions in a relaxed fashion, and to frame the question in a conversational tone. For example, you might preface the question with, “I’m really keen on the development opportunities I might have here. Can you tell me about the development others have had?”

To get comfortable with these questions, practice with a friend or family member beforehand.

Here are examples of good or bad answers to your questions. Both types of answers provide insightful information – you will have a pretty good idea of what the experience will be like working for this manager. At least then you have information to make a considered view about whether you want this job working for this manager.

**I’m really interested to hear about the young people who have worked with you over the last couple of years. Can you tell me about them, and where are they now?**

Desired Answer	Undesired Answer
<p>“Sure! Let me see. I have had four young people working for me over the last few years. Two of them, Angela and Peter, are still with us on the team. They have moved from being mentored in the role to now undertaking projects on their own. One person, Jill, accepted a promotion to another department, and one recently left to join another company where he was given a really good role.”</p> <p><i>Note:</i> this answer is desired as the manager has provided specific information on specific individuals that allows you to picture what’s happened.</p>	<p>“MMmmm. Let me think. I’ve had four, no, three young people working for me the last few years. What I have found is that they were too impatient for promotion. You really need to be patient in learning the basics of the role. Then things can come your way.”</p> <p>You ask: “So are the three people still here?”</p> <p>Answer: “One is. The others have left.”</p> <p><i>Note:</i> this answer is undesirable in that it is vague and not a desired outcome. You get the feeling that the manager is not very active in ensuring a positive workplace experience. They are not specific and deflect the situation away from themselves</p>

**Can you tell me about their development?**

Desired Answer	Undesired Answer
<p>“Development takes a number of forms. I meet monthly with the young members on my team and we discuss the projects they have been working on, and what they have learned. We also discuss journals and books they have read – once a month we have a book club coffee where I lead a discussion on the current book the young people are reading. Part of our appraisal system involves a development discussion. Angela recently attended a project management course, and over the last three months, Peter participated on a task force with another department.”</p>	<p>“I’m very supportive of people’s development. A lot of development is on-the-job training. If people have a suggestion for a development course, they are welcome to bring it forward for me to consider.”</p>

**What work assignments have young people had in their first six months of work?**

Desired Answer	Undesired Answer
<p>“Let’s talk about our two most recent starters. Angela was with us for a month when we had a project come along that she could get her teeth into. She worked with Jane, one of our experience people, and was working on a client’s site in that second month. Peter showed a flair for analysis, so he quickly got into a market assessment of a new product we were planning. I should say that both Angela and Peter showed a lot of initiative and energy, so that is an important part of why they have had those opportunities.”</p>	<p>“Well, the first six months is a learning period. You will be following experienced people during the first six months. It probably at the end of six months you will start working on key projects.”</p>

**Do you have a staff development program? What is your role in that program?**

Desired Answer	Undesired Answer
<p>“Yes we do. Every graduate participates. We have a site manager responsible for the program, and you will meet with that person soon after you join. I attend all the local sessions, and last year I was a mentor in a national graduate event that we held.”</p>	<p>“Yes we do. Every graduate participates. It runs quite informally. Some areas are more active than others. In this location, we are so pushed for time and getting products out to customers we don’t seem to have much time left over for the graduate program. I haven’t had a chance for the last few years to become involved.”</p>

**Have you ever had a staff opinion survey? What were the results?**

Desired Answer	Undesired Answer
<p>“We did a staff survey six months ago. I’ll show you the results... (goes to the filing cabinet)...here they are. Overall staff satisfaction was pretty good. Here are my team’s results, which at 75% is slightly higher than the overall result of 67%. My team was very satisfied with their development, and with their immediate manager I’m pleased to say! There’s one key concern I had from the results that we are working on...”</p>	<p>“We did a staff survey six months ago. I’m not sure where I filed the results. But from recollection, the results were okay. People across the firm are pretty concerned about the same thing...mainly communication and pay.”</p> <p><i>Note:</i> The answer is not specific, and also related to the overall company rather than the team’s results. Also, not knowing where the results are filed may mean that the manager does not treat them as a priority, or it could mean that the manager did not want to show the results. Or it could mean that the results are filed with the Human Resources department and genuinely the manager would not be expected to have them on-hand. No conclusion can be drawn from the information given on this point.</p>

**Do you mind if I talk to young people on your team about the development they have had and what sort of experience I am likely to get here?**

<b>Desired Answer</b>	<b>Undesired Answer</b>
“Sure. That’s a great idea. Let me set that up. Next time you come in you can meet with Angela and Peter over a coffee, and have a chat to them about all these things, so you can get a good picture of how it will be to work here. I won’t join you so that I don’t influence the discussion.”	“Yes, we can do that. Although the one person you could talk to, Jo, has only been here for a few months, so I’m not sure what value you will get. You can meet with Jo and me next time you are in.”

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