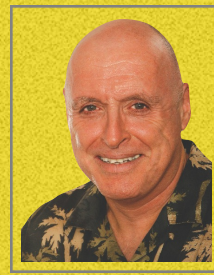


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1524 Learn From a Highly Difficult Boss — Part 1

It was the strangest job I ever signed on for, could have been something exceptional, ended in a weird and confusing manner, and I was left with a “bad boss” story. I came out of it with a positive, but it took me a while to pin down the reasons for that. I’m Jerry Roberts, and today we’ll talk about working for a boss who is tough to love. That’s coming next on The Extra Point.

I’ve worked for a couple dozen owners and managers as I’ve wound my way through my career. Three were head and shoulders above the rest, three were in the bad boss category, and the rest were just okay. We got along and the work got done — but there was little to distinguish them, one from the next. Nothing to write home about.

On the other hand, there was plenty to talk about when it came to those bosses whom I placed in the top and bottom lists.

About a year after leaving Guam in the 1980s, I took a job as Southern California manager for a company that was operating in (I think) 26 cities.

The guy who hired me had told me that the operation was solid, didn’t have a serious competitor, and my role was to maintain that status. Fix something it got broken, do a little PR with the clients, and not try to reinvent the wheel. Okay, fair enough. That’s what I did.

Immediately, I saw that the pay was very low for the value of the work being done. Key talent couldn’t live on their paycheck, and I pitched the owner to adjust salaries. That was not met with glee, and he told me that my job was to keep pay down and keep people happy with what they were getting — or replace them.

After pushing a little more, I was able to get the top person a new contract, and a small raise for a few others. As I look back, I believe that put a wedge between the owner and me. I saw increasing compensation as a way to

strengthen the team, especially since we were making a ton of money and the employees knew it.

No one is irreplaceable, but we had a couple of people who came close. Losing them would have cost us.

All of this communication was over the phone. I had yet to meet him in person. He would visit the L.A. office a few times each year, and on his next trip, he made a concerted effort to make me the butt of his jokes in front of my team.

I knew a little about humor having done almost a decade in morning radio, and one of the key concepts is that you have to “know the room.” That means the better you understand your audience, the better you are in getting over with them. This man didn’t know when to stop.

When the employees stopped laughing after his third, fourth, fifth effort, I had to laugh for them to cover him from embarrassment. You cover for your boss, even when the boss is making a fool of him- or herself.

Whenever he called for me, it seemed there was an edge to his voice and the conversation. It seemed clear to me that this guy did not like me much. What had I done to bring this on?

One day as I was talking through an issue with the senior VP who ran most of the operations, he stopped in the middle of the conversation and told me not to worry about what was going on with the owner. He said that he was basically a good guy, just tough to figure out at first. If I stayed with the job, I’d learn things from him I couldn’t learn anywhere else.

I had not complained to the VP, or given him any reason to say all that. He volunteered the information. That told me the owner had likely complained to him about me. Yet, it gave me some hope in moving forward.

(Con’t.)

I tried to see him in a different light, focusing on his way of working with clients when he came to town.

He'd include me in business lunches, and I'd see how he effortlessly weaved stories into the conversations, and how people responded to him in a positive way. He was a master at it, and I took major mental notes.

As I learned from him, it made his attitude towards me less of an issue. I was thinking of leaving the company, and shelved those plans, at least for a while.

It turned out to be the wrong decision. What happened next was totally out of the blue, was totally unnecessary, and got me my bad boss story. That's coming tomorrow.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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