

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**J**onar Nader is a digital-age philosopher and educator who has worked and consulted for some of the world's largest organisations, including Compaq, Acer, and IBM. ★ He was the co-founder of the Information Technology Society and the New Leaders Foundation. ★ He is the author of *How to Lose Friends and Infuriate Your Boss* (in its 2nd edition), *How to Lose Friends and Infuriate People* (in its 5th edition), *How to Lose Friends and Infuriate Thinkers*, *How to Lose Friends and Infuriate Lovers* and *How to Lose Friends and Infuriate Competitors*. His first novel, called 'Z', is a suspense thriller, now in paperback. He is also the author of *Prentice Hall's Illustrated Dictionary of Computing* (in its 3rd edition), and the technology writer for *Butterworth's Legal Dictionary* (in its 2nd edition), and the *Concise Legal Dictionary* (in its 3rd edition). ★ Jonar is a lecturer, corporate presenter, and consultant in the areas of technology, leadership, management, thinking skills, teamwork, employee engagement, marketing, advertising, and national security. ★ Jonar is a broadcaster, journalist, futurist, technologist, and social commentator, and has worked as a magazine editor and writer for a range of international fashion, art, advertising, motor racing, and technology magazines. ★ Through his company Logictivity, Jonar advises many chairmen and CEOs. He also assists executives when they need technical, professional, market, or management advice. He can be contacted via:

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*I am indebted to each of my ex-bosses.*

THE *vulgar* BOSSES  
FORCED ME TO LEARN ABOUT RESPECT.

THE *selfish* BOSSES  
HELPED ME TO UNDERSTAND COMPASSION.

THE *generous* BOSSES  
ALLOWED ME TO SPREAD MY WINGS.

THE *patient* BOSSES  
KEPT ME ON THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW.



THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO  
THE *ghastly* BOSSES  
WHO GAVE ME AMPLE REASONS  
TO FOCUS ON MY CAREER  
SO THAT I COULD ESCAPE FROM THEIR GRIP.

IT IS ALSO DEDICATED TO  
THE *gracious* BOSSES  
WHO ALLOWED ME TO MAKE MISTAKES  
FROM WHICH I WAS ABLE TO LEARN  
ABOUT FAILURE AND SUCCESS.



CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

HEROES  
FROM HEAVEN

*Managers who enrich your life*

*The best gift  
you can  
give someone  
is a dream*

**P**RODUCTS SUCH AS DIAMONDS ARE SOLD ON THE BASIS OF THEIR SCARCITY. THEIR PRICING STRUCTURE IS DELICATELY BALANCED between supply and demand. If anyone were to find large diamond deposits that dramatically tipped that balance, they could push the price of diamonds down to that of glass.

Within our social structure, many things are precious because they are rare. If scarcity is the key to our economic system, should we make anything available in plentiful supply? For example, would we want everyone to be in good health? Even if we were able to eradicate the common cold, think of the millions of people who would become jobless, and the hundreds of factories that would have to close down. The health industry wants to make us better, but it cannot afford to rid the world of all its ailments because an oversupply of healthy people would send it broke.

*The application of discipline is not aimed at suppressing desire, but at eliminating self-destructive habits*

What about management? Would industries thrive on an abundance of skilled managers? Or is it important to maintain a level of scarcity on that front as well? Surely it does not make sense to wish upon ourselves bad bosses and oppressive leaders.

There are two issues to consider. The first is that good managers are *not* scarce. There are plenty of them. The problem is that they quickly become 'bad managers' amid corrupt environments that drag everyone down to the lowest common denominator. One good boss can rarely survive a diseased environment because evil always wins over good, and therefore it is easy to thwart wholesome efforts with corporate cancer. The second issue relates to the difficulty of recognising intangibles. A broken chair is a tangible object that is easily identified, whereas a good boss is hard to spot because the intangible qualities are not readily evident.

As a result of this dilemma, good bosses are often revered in *hindsight*, not at the time of their reign. Some people fantasise about how exciting it would have been if they were able to work with Albert Einstein, George Patton, Napoleon Bonaparte, Oliver Cromwell, Sun Tzu, Frederick the Great, Julius Caesar, or Henry Ford. The same could be said about poets and artists. It seems that the dearly departed command more respect than the current crop.

If you can identify 'the boss from heaven', it would mean that you are able to identify modern-day heroes who will be saluted by future generations. Do not pass up an



opportunity to become a student of skilled managers. Your challenge would be to identify who they are, and then to look, listen, and learn.

## HEAVENLY QUALITIES

When asked what they would consider to be the hallmarks of an ideal boss, employees ask for someone who is friendly, caring, fair, intelligent, supportive, happy, approachable, helpful, and knowledgeable. Although these qualities are desirable, they ought to be normal attributes for *all* managers.

The boss from heaven should possess *exceptional* characteristics that are above and beyond the call of duty. The following are some of the special qualities that define the ideal boss who can turbo-charge your career.

### I. THE IDEAL BOSS IS ABLE TO COACH

How would you know what a coach looks like? What is the role of a coach, and what would be your role as a student? Coaches are those who urge you to take paths whose outcomes are of benefit to *you*, whereas taskmasters are those who urge you to undertake assignments purely for *their* own benefit.

A good coach will allow you to make mistakes, because the function of the coach is not to tell you what to do, but to alert you to the potential consequences, and to guide you through decision-making processes.

*Confidence  
does not translate  
into perfection,  
but into excellence.  
Yet, excellence  
does not guarantee  
success.*

The most important challenge for a coach is to teach you the sense of timing. Much like a conductor who keeps the orchestra playing to time, a coach will assist you to develop your career by helping you to learn when to deviate from the path, and when to apply certain disciplines.

In modern corporate environments, managers are not obliged to act as coaches. Their role is to run departments with the help of skilled employees. If you are fortunate enough to have a boss who is willing to coach you, and if you want to seize the golden opportunity, it is incumbent upon you to learn how to listen and how to ask the right questions. Above all, you must reciprocate with discipline. Talk to young people about discipline, and they will presume that you are asking them to lead a boring, uninteresting life. They see discipline as the thief of fun. The application of discipline is not aimed at suppressing desire, but at eliminating self-destructive habits to the point where the triggers are eradicated.

A good coach will never expect anything in return, but will insist on discipline from every student, because coaching is a resource-intensive affair. For that reason, take care that you do not drain your coach to the point where you will lose the opportunity to stride into a successful future.

## 2. THE IDEAL BOSS IS CONFIDENT

When managers act with confidence, it is not unusual for bystanders and critics to accuse them of lacking

humility. For some reason, people feel uneasy around confident operators.

Confidence does not translate into perfection, but into excellence. Yet, excellence does not guarantee success. The function of excellence is to align elements in the best possible manner, given the conditions at hand. This means that a confident person is not someone who knows that success is imminent, but who is certain that everything possible has been done to ward off failure.

If you can learn to observe the ways in which confident operators work, you will see that their attention-to-detail does not come from a desire to live in an orderly world. Instead, it comes from an understanding that they live amid chaos.

Apathy leads to complacency, whereas confidence leads to self-satisfaction. Observers who do not understand this, tend to accuse confident people of being smug.

To appreciate the art of confidence you need to learn the art of planning. Remember that confidence is the end-result of careful planning. It is a veneer, behind which is intricate detail. If you can learn to discern between detail and clutter, you will be able to operate confidently. Failure in the face of confidence is called experience. In the face of confusion, it is called carelessness.

*If your manager is consistent, consider yourself lucky. It takes a fair amount of energy to resist the temptations to deviate from the straight and narrow.*

### 3. THE IDEAL BOSS IS CONSISTENT

Some people are considered predictable. Take them to a restaurant, and you can guess which meal they will order. Predictability is not the same as consistency. Predictability refers to the outcome, whereas consistency refers to the processes used to arrive at an outcome.

Consistency is not related to stubbornness or rigidity. Rather, it refers to solidity and firmness that come from conviction. When one's values are solid and one's ethics are firm, one is able to navigate through life's dense jungles without losing direction.

Consistency allows us to land on our feet, no matter what happens. At the administrative level, consistency saves time. At the personal level, it saves heartache. At the business level, it saves guesswork. At the professional level, it saves energy.

If your manager is consistent, consider yourself lucky. It takes a fair amount of energy to resist the temptations to deviate from the straight and narrow. Entering a life of mediocrity looks appealing amid relentless opposition. Within a thankless environment, the quick-fix approach is expedient and alluring.

Note that 'consistency of method' does not necessarily translate into 'consistency of outcome'. This means that what you see is not necessarily what you will always get. For example, people who are consistently kind and caring are not

pushovers. They know how to stand up for themselves, and they will react unkindly to anyone who abuses them. It is due to their rock-solid ethics and values that they will retaliate against anyone who violates their trust or who threatens the foundations from which their gentleness emerges.

When you start to appreciate the benefits of consistency, you will begin to see how enjoyable it can be to work with those who say what they mean and mean what they say, and with those who are prepared to fight to protect their values.

#### 4. THE IDEAL BOSS IS DECISIVE

If you have observed remarkable musicians, you might have wondered how many years of practice would be required to reach a high level of competence. No matter how easy they make it appear, we appreciate their talent because their dedication culminates in a form that can be seen and heard *immediately*. When skill and talent combine to produce tangible results that can be assessed in their totality (such as music we can hear), we are able to appreciate their depth.

*If your manager seems to be a good decision maker and a maker of good decisions, you would be advised to learn as much as you can about the reasons behind each action*

What about intangible skills such as the ability to make good decisions? The process of decision-making also requires years of practice. Unfortunately, there can be no accolades for the decision-maker because not every decision results in

a tangible masterstroke. Besides, few people can appreciate what it means to be a maker of good decisions.

Music teachers have an advantage in that they can tantalise students by giving a demonstration and then saying, 'If you continue with your lessons, you too could play like this.' They are able to demonstrate the desired end-result. Unfortunately, decision makers cannot demonstrate their skill. To make matters worse, they have to battle opponents who cannot understand the strategy. The game of chess is a visual interpretation of mental dexterity. For the uninitiated, it appears as a game of warfare. For those who appreciate the complexity of the human brain, chess gives them an insight into the ways in which the trillions of brain cells interact under pressure to produce short-term moves for long-term outcomes.

Try to observe your manager's every move, and then try to unravel the decision-making process. You would need both observation and memory skills to notice a pattern that culminates in successful outcomes. If your manager seems to be a good decision maker *and* a maker of good decisions, you would be advised to learn as much as you can about the reasons behind each action. If you can learn from a skilled strategist, you will be well on your way to joining the ranks of winners who can plan for long-term victories by undertaking prudent short-term steps.

As a keen student, your challenge would be to ask the pertinent questions so that your boss could impart some

of the clues about the complex processes involved in decision-making. When you can learn to be decisive, you will delight in the mental thunderstorms that spark to produce lit pathways to success so that eventually you can traverse any terrain without fear.

## 5. THE IDEAL BOSS IS DISCREET

The art of discretion is multifaceted. The common understanding of its application pertains to keeping secrets. Immature managers tend to select a small number of subordinates to whom they disclose secrets as a way of buying loyalty. In no time, cliques are formed whereby some staff members have an advantage over others.

Good managers do not divulge confidential information to anyone, regardless of friendships. They know how to treat all subordinates impartially. To them, discretion is maintained on the basis of honour, as well as good judgement.

Prudent managers are discreet because they do not want to jeopardise the success of a project. They understand that it would be unwise to burden people with information that they might not be able to handle.

Compassionate managers understand that discretion is also concerned with not forcing people to divulge personal information. They are careful to resist the temptation to pry into other people's affairs.

Managers from heaven will use discretion as a tool of grace. This means that they will disregard past failures or

irrelevant personal frailties when negotiating with subordinates. You might have come across such managers who never ask awkward questions. Do not mistake their grace for ignorance. They might pretend to know nothing, simply because they might have the perceptivity to know that they would be causing you some grief if they were to pursue a certain line of enquiry. By the way, my definition of grace is ‘not burdening others with your expectations’.

If your manager gives you the freedom to make mistakes and does not hold your prior misdemeanours against you, consider yourself fortunate. All too often in this selfish world, people delight in pinning evidence on others. It is common to find people who delight in others’ weaknesses. They reveal the fact that they know more about you than they should, and then they suppress their knowledge, so long as you show them that you are grateful. If ever you waiver from the path that suits them, they will threaten to divulge your secrets to others.

If you have noticed that your manager does not play these underhanded games, be sure to reciprocate. The ultimate skill in exercising discretion is knowing when *not* to ask questions that might embarrass others or put them under an intrusive spotlight. People harbour several nerve-racking fears, including the fear of being forced to divulge their private affairs. If your boss has spared you, and helped you to ‘save face’, you can count your blessings because all too often, curiosity and mischief are tools used by managers who try



to tame their subordinates via psychological bullying or via intimidation.

## 6. THE IDEAL BOSS IS ECCENTRIC

Conventional wisdom has it that successful people are those who can 'ride the wave'. Business schools teach would-be high-flyers that the secret to 'making it big' is being able to jump on the bandwagon of the day. Undoubtedly, there is money to be made by rushing to seize new opportunities.

What bounty hunters do not realise is that a 'wave' is symbolic of a lot of people rushing to cash in on a new idea. The clever people are those who are *ahead* of the wave, not on top of it. They are the pioneers who forge through the dense bush, unaided and unappreciated. Sometimes pioneers are ridiculed for daring to venture alone to pursue what seem to be bizarre ideas. Their courage or foresight is sometimes seen as eccentricity.

Eccentric people are those who do things that others consider to be odd. Sometimes their unusual behaviour amuses observers who cannot help but smile at their peculiarity.

To classify eccentrics as just those who act differently, would miss other types of 'oddballs' who also *think* differently and who are non-conformists in their strategic approach. They are reasonable, except that they reason differently. They are rational, except that they rationalise differently. They are methodical, except that they use different

methodologies. Those who are not prepared to take the conventional routes to solving problems, invariably clash with people who accuse them of being erratic or unpredictable.

The essence of an eccentric is not to think differently, but to allow different inputs to be assessed on their merits. Assumptions are not permitted until all the inputs have been reviewed. This does not mean that an eccentric seeks to be different, but rather operates from the belief that each situation should be judged on the evidence at hand. When working with others who prefer to jump to conclusions, eccentrics are not appreciated. For example, they might insist on being meticulous when others are prepared to be careless. That alone is seen as an irritating trait. Eccentrics never jump to conclusions — they browse to conclusions after surveying the environment and assessing all the possible options. If they cannot find solutions easily, they are prepared to go looking for them.

If your manager is an eccentric thinker, you stand a greater chance of being ahead of the wave. You would have to pave your own path as you search for new opportunities in uncharted territories. Those who are ahead of the pack are those who find the treasures — thereafter, they are swamped with instant believers.

## 7. THE IDEAL BOSS IS AN EXPERIMENTER

The most annoying thing for experimenters is to work with impatient colleagues who do not understand the essence of

experimentation. If your boss likes to experiment, you might be tempted to ask, ‘What are you hoping to find?’ This is not a useful question because your boss might not know the answer. Innovators and experimenters understand that the most important generators of ideas are wildcards and ‘accidents of invention’. For example, while practical people tend to question the value of investing in space-probes that are sent to Mars, experimenters delight in the ‘process’ because they are creating environments that could trigger accidents of invention — that means, they create sufficient tension from which springs new problems and new discoveries that might not otherwise have been created.

Accidents of invention are the unknowns that surface after unlikely events occur. It is no wonder that some of the most significant inventions of our time have come about by accident as a result of sheer experimentation.

You can learn a lot by observing how experimenters work. They are like the children who derive greater pleasure in *fixing* a go-kart than in *riding* it. The thrill of experimentation is not in achieving an end result, but in observing the remarkable processes unfold, triggering new ideas that might not otherwise have emerged. People who can capture sparks of ideas are called geniuses. Geniuses do not sit still and come up with ideas. They are agitators who observe the most unlikely of situations in the hope of finding the glue that binds their wild thoughts to form a germ of an idea that later takes flight with hard work and skill. Musicians, writers, and

artists find their inspiration in the most unlikely places. They are never actually doing what people think they are doing. They might go to a shopping centre merely to observe the million-and-one aspects of life inside. They might undertake unusual trips or they might venture into unfamiliar territories. They do not know what they are looking for, but they know that if they poke the fire, sparks will fly.

If your boss is an experimenter, learn to open your eyes so that you can see with peripheral vision. Central objects rarely capture their attention. Although they appear aloof and disinterested, experimenters are actually observing things that other people are not looking at. At parties, they do not look at the eye-catching person, but at those who are looking at that person.

## 8. THE IDEAL BOSS IS GENEROUS

Our society functions best when the learned are generous with their information. This means that the 'educated' ought to become 'educators'. Graduates need to realise that their education must not be seen as a 'commercial advantage' or as intellectual property, but as a 'social responsibility'. They have a duty to *share* their knowledge.

If you can benefit from your manager's experiences, you stand to save a lot of time, energy, and effort. Heroes from heaven are generous because they do not subscribe to the antiquated attitudes of 'knowledge is power'. They know that the greatest power comes from an informed and

enlightened group. If information is only rationed to the chosen few, it suppresses creativity, thwarts opportunities for victory, and minimises the potential for synergy.

When people are generous with tangible gifts, their actions are easily detected. When you are given a box of chocolates, you are able to see generosity in action. Unfortunately, when people are generous with intangible gifts, such as their time or their peace, you might not recognise it, because intangible gifts often pass unnoticed. Your biggest challenge would be to know when you are being showered with intangible gifts.

## 9. THE IDEAL BOSS IS A MENTOR

There are differences between coaching and mentoring. A coach is someone who can guide you through practical aspects of your job or your craft, whereas a mentor is concerned with your overall personal strategies. Mentors in the workplace are rarer than coaches, despite the trendy so-called ‘mentoring programs’ being implemented by organisations whose high staff-turnover is an indication of the lack of communication between the ranks.

A good mentor is akin to a *tormentor* — someone who shakes you out of your comfort zone and asks you perplexing questions that cause you to sigh at the overwhelming challenges that are being put before you.

If your manager torments you, maybe you are being assisted to empty your knowledge-base so that you can reset

your system and refresh your attitudes. The hallmark of a good mentor is the ability to answer your questions with even better questions. The role of the mentor is to prepare you to think for yourself, not to give you the answers. Therefore, next time you feel that your manager has not been forthcoming with immediate answers, consider the possibility that you are being challenged for your own good, and are being given clues to help you to find a better way.

## 10. THE IDEAL BOSS IS PASSIONATE

Passionate people are sometimes told to relax and to stop being intense. This would drive them mad because they are serious about their work. After querying the status of a project, I was told to ‘relax’. This led me to exclaim, ‘Don’t tell me to relax. Relaxing makes me nervous!’

Passionate people do not understand what it means to ‘take it easy’. They take life seriously and they immerse themselves in their craft. They enjoy what they do, and they are highly focussed on the process *and* on the outcome.

*Don't  
tell me  
to relax.  
Relaxing  
makes me  
nervous.*

It seems to be socially acceptable to be passionate about sport. Passionate players are cheered on by passionate spectators. They excuse their intensity on the basis that they are enthusiasts who love their sport.

Similarly, there are people for whom *work* is stimulating and just as rewarding. The last thing that they want to hear

is people urging them to be indifferent. Passionate workers derive as much pleasure from their work as any serious sports person might derive pleasure from playing sport.

If you are fortunate enough to work with a passionate boss, see if you can learn about the stimuli that make it all worthwhile. Your work is something that consumes a lot of your energy, so it is in your interest to understand how you can be energised by it. It would make sense to sharpen your appreciation of your profession. If you cannot do that, you might be in an industry or in an environment that does not suit your temperament.

## II. THE IDEAL BOSS IS PLAYFUL

For some children, their playfulness comes to an abrupt halt in their mid-teens when they convince themselves that it is no longer 'cool' to smile. They walk about with a stern look on their face, hoping to project an image of seriousness. They presume that a demure look gives them an air of intelligence. What they do not realise is that they appear more aggressive than pensive. Some adults seem to have not grown out of that unapproachable disposition. Their sternness becomes their shield.

Sometimes, a stern approach to business seems to be an expedient way to ward off unpleasant attacks or insensitive probes. For example, there are many celebrities who are unable to cope with the attention that they receive from their overbearing fans, so they appear aloof.

There could be many reasons why managers project an unfriendly image. Whatever the reason, the signals are unimpressive. If your manager is playful, approachable, and friendly, be sure to not abuse that relationship by overstepping your mark. Maintain the protocols and due respect, and do not presume that a happy manner gives you licence to become sloppy or to get personal.

The greatest mistake would be to assume that happy and playful managers are frivolous. They are serious about maintaining a happy working environment. It is for this reason that they will pounce on those who jeopardise the cheerful environment.

If your manager knows how to have fun at work, go with the flow, but never assume that anything other than excellence would be tolerated.

## 12. THE IDEAL BOSS IS RESOLUTE

There are two types of resolute managers. The first is the type that leads the way and sets the tone for everything. This type of manager wants employees to obey all the rules. In so doing, the manager is seen as the strong leader who sets the direction and leads from the front, saying, 'Please don't deviate from this plan. If there are any problems, come to me.'

The second type of manager is the supporter who hires experts, gives them all the tools, and then sits back and waits to be called to assist. When called, the manager springs into action with guns blazing, ready to defend the troops against



anyone who gets in their way. This type of manager says, 'You do what you think is best, and I'll be here to support you.'

Resolute managers can be trusted to adhere to their decisions and to follow-up on their promises. Once they have made up their mind, they do not take kindly to anyone who jeopardises their authority. They are the type who would dig their heels in at all costs because they would be more concerned about the precedent of having one of their decisions overturned. Stalwarts such as these are a joy to work with because their word is their bond.

## HEROES EVERYWHERE

Imagine if you could hone your skills to spot heroes in all areas of your life. Living today are numerous gifted people who are like Custer, Edison, Ghandi, Gibran, Mozart, and Rembrandt. Fame is not the only measure of brilliance. Your next-door neighbour might be a person who could enrich your life. Learn to look deeper than people's veneers and you might find that you are rubbing shoulders with fascinating people from whom you might learn new skills.

What is better than having a great idea? Being able to recognise good ideas! What is better than being a hero? Being able to recognise heroes!

Learn to embrace the generosity of those who can help you to raise your standards. If ever you ask what you can do to repay such people, the answer is likely to be, 'I ask

nothing from you except that you promise that you'll one day go out and show the same kindness to someone else who could benefit from you.' After you have been blessed by heroes from heaven, it would become your responsibility to go out and bless others. In the same way that heroes are everywhere, so too are deserving people. It would not be up to you to decide who is worthy of your gifts. A boss gives to all employees who wish to receive. **S**