

# Providium Human Resource Group

## A New Question for All Managers

By Seth Silver, Ed.D. © 2007

In the vast array of articles, books and courses on leadership, this question is often posed by authors and trainers alike: would you work for you? The question presumes some act of perfect cloning in which, for example, I would be replicated with all of my experiences, strengths and weaknesses and would then have to work for my clone. It is intended to cause reflection and help managers realize how much they would probably dread receiving the poor behaviors they often dispense to others.

While the question is thought-provoking for many, I believe it does not go far enough, nor does it apply to all managers. In fact, a number of managers to whom I have posed this question were themselves 'raised' with a succession of "C" bosses: controlling, condescending, complaining, critical and careless. These managers sincerely believe these behaviors are appropriate to their job and have helped them get where they are today. In other words, they would work for clones of themselves and have in the past worked for close approximations.

The more potent question, which I believe reaches the widest spectrum of managerial orientations is: *would you want your spouse (or significant other), or your adult child in their first or second major work experience, to work with your clone?*

Think about the first part of this question. If your spouse works, you've probably heard him/her vent or complain about the boss, the job, colleagues or customers. How did you feel hearing these frustrations, hurts or resentments? In those moments of well-intended listening, you likely wished your spouse worked for a more enlightened, capable and caring manager, if for no other reason than to save you from hearing these complaints after your own long day!

Imagine now that your spouse works with your clone. Would he/she bring you work anecdotes of new accomplishments, helpful coaching, words of encouragement, exciting opportunities, and teamwork rewarded? Or would the anecdotes be about good work unnoticed, talents under-utilized, ideas unheard, micro-management and acts of mistrust and insecurity?

Most parents would likely empathize with their adult child in the workforce. As an adult child of living parents, I have often shared work related frustrations and joys with them. Whether by phone or in person, I knew they felt my experiences with me, sometimes more deeply than I did. In a loving and protective way, they 'shared my pain', my excitement, and have wanted only the best for me in the world of work. Indeed, what concerned parent would not want the best for their child? So, to help managers examine their workplace behavior, again consider the question: would you want your adult son or daughter to work with your clone? What stories would they bring back to you if they had to work with someone who thought, behaved and managed exactly as you do at work? How would those stories make you feel?

To benefit in a practical way from the new question, consider this idea. First, make a list of 5-10 positive practices, habits, and beliefs you believe you display at work, that your spouse or adult child would agree motivate, encourage, and help others at work to feel good about the job and themselves. Second, make a list of 5-10 negative practices, habits and beliefs you display at work, that your spouse or adult child would agree demotivate, discourage, and lead others to feel frustrated or ready to leave. Finally, review the lists for validation and comment with: two trusted peers; two trusted subordinates; and, if you really can take the honest truth about how you are perceived, your spouse and a working adult child if you have one. This might be the best feedback you ever get. It may also help those managers who are now "C" bosses, that is, controlling, condescending, complaining, careless and critical, to become "A" bosses, advocating, advising, affirming, acknowledging and allowing.