



Aggressive bosses have a bad effect on workers and profits

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Workplace

AUSTRALIAN bosses are failing to “practice what they preach” and this is having a negative effect on sales, profit and shareholder satisfaction, according to new research.

Analysis of 1215 organisations and more than 50,000 individual leaders in Australia and New Zealand shows 76 per cent of top executives who want employees to behave in a constructive manner unwittingly cause them to be either aggressive and defensive, or passive and defensive.

“Unfortunately the ‘do as I say, not as I do’ behaviour leads to a ‘do as I do’ mentality, where bad habits are learned and mirrored,” research author and head of consultancy firm Human Synergistics, Shaun McCarthy, said.

Examples of this include staff being encouraged to co-operate with others while the culture from above is such that they compete instead. Or the directive to maintain personal integrity becomes a

game of politics to gain influence; responsibility and accountability force decisions aimed at just being pushed upwards; creativity and innovation turn into treating rules more importantly than ideas and taking moderate risks means making sure you’re never blamed for problems.

Companies such as Lion Nathan, Freedom Group and MasterCard have recognised the trend and say they’ve benefited from a change program developed by Human Synergistics.

MasterCard’s general manager Australasia Leigh Clapham attributes the changes to increasing market share from 29 per cent to 40 per cent and 1.6 million additional accounts over the last three years: “it was a big wake-up call and a confronting process for those leading a department to be told by staff they were coming across in quite a different way than they thought.”

Mr Clapham said team leaders

were being overly aggressive, power-hungry and competitive.

“There was so much static that the company was not focused on outcomes, but competing against each other and avoiding responsibility.” He said that after the behaviour of 30 managers was assessed and they made undertakings to correct negative aspects, there was almost an immediate change, with people working more confidently. This in turn generated new business.

Mr McCarthy said changes need only be small to influence staff positively. These include bosses modulating voices, letting others have their say before suggesting a solution, trusting staff to pursue an idea and not to take a negative approach if times are tough.

Typically Australian bosses were more aggressive than their western counterparts which stemmed from a competitive “knocking” culture where icons such as the “Aussie battler” tended to be aggressive.