

Power-Driven Managers

GOOD GUYS MAKE BUM BOSSES

A boss bent on being loved can cause confusion among employees, plus a drop in morale and output.
by David C. McClelland and David H. Burnham

FRED AND PAUL ARE TWO MANAGERS in the same large corporation. Fred is a friendly sort of guy. He spends lots of time rapping with his subordinates, and prides himself on being warm and sympathetic. If an employee were to ask for time off to take care of a personal problem, Fred would worry about the rules but probably give in.

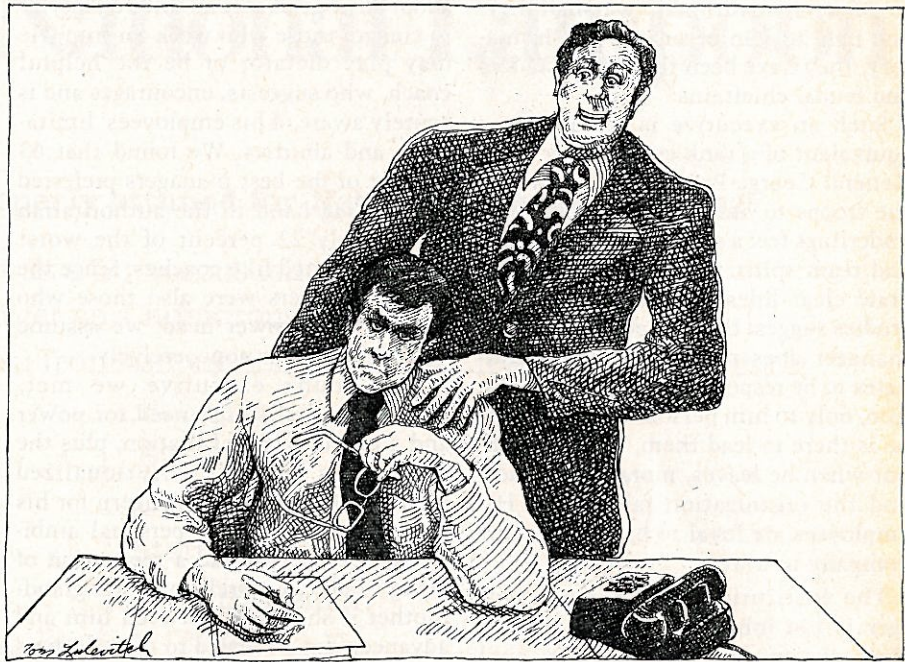
Paul, on the other hand, loves to be a boss and spends his time nudging subordinates to do their jobs. Although his manner is amiable, it is distinctly less personal and warm than Fred's. His primary loyalty is to the organization. If an employee asked him for time off because of a personal problem, Paul would suggest that he use up some vacation days or take an unpaid leave of absence.

Who is the better manager? Many people would quickly choose generous, friendly Fred. He is humane, egalitarian and understanding. But our research shows that nice guys like Fred often make bum bosses. Compared to Paul, he gets less work out of his people and creates lower morale.

In our search for the key to executive personality, we have found that effective managers share a striking characteristic—the need for power. This motive, a basic desire to influence and lead others, drives able executives in many different lines of work. Like Paul, most go by the rule book.

Power and Affiliation. We began one recent experiment by testing the managers of 49 departments in a large American corporation. The tests showed whether each executive was concerned primarily with achievement, with power, or with affiliation (having friendly relations with others). We knew from 20 years of research that entrepreneurs, the innovators who start new businesses, have a high need for achievement. But only in the last five years have we gone beyond those who start new organizations to study the people who later move into the chains of command.

Power and affiliation, not achievement, turned out to be the important scores among the 49 line managers. They divided into two basic types, the power-motivated managers like Paul



Tom Lulevich

and the affiliative managers like Fred.

We worked first with sales departments, dividing them evenly between those with above-average and those with below-average sales. Only 20 percent of the better half were run by managers with a higher need for affiliation than for power. But 90 percent of the poorer ones were run by affiliatives. So power managers ran 80 percent of the best, only 10 percent of the worst. (The characteristics of women managers are somewhat different. All the managers in this study were male.)

In other departments (design, development, production) we found the same link between the manager's drive and the department's performance. Affiliative managers ran only 27 percent of the better departments, but 78 percent of the weaker half. On the other hand, power managers ran 73 percent of the good ones, only 22 percent of the weak ones.

Wishy-Washy Decisions. We had previously asked the employees in each department to fill out a detailed questionnaire about their morale and how their bosses ran things. These reports provided clear insight into the connection between the manager's personality and the department's success or failure.

The affiliative manager has a greater need for fellowship than for power and

influence. His desire to be liked leads him into wishy-washy decisions. Because he wants to stay on good terms with anyone he works with, he cares more about the happiness of particular individuals than the well-being of the whole working group. By making many exceptions to company rules, he violates one of bureaucracy's first principles—fairness.

When a manager bends the rules for particular individuals, he often alienates other workers. His failure to treat people equally destroys the worker's faith in the corporate reward system. His inconsistent decisions may also make his subordinates feel powerless to control events by their behavior. Whether they do well or badly, they don't know what to expect next.

Because the need for power takes two different forms, power managers tend to fall into two groups: the personal-power group and the social- or institutional-power group. In previous research, we had found that these two forms of the power motive even affect the way people drive cars or drink whiskey [see "The Power of Positive Drinking," *pt.*, January 1971]. Men with a strong need for personal power use their cars like weapons and make mean drunks, but the ones who use power for the benefit of others are safer drivers