

# What Do Your Direct Reports Want from You? (Part 1)

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Could you describe what you desire in a boss? How about if I gave you a “multiple choice” list of twenty values, personal traits, and characteristics?

Could you select the few key qualities that you most admire? If your boss lived those each day, would you be more willing to follow his or her direction?

It would be easy, right? In fact, there are probably several things about your boss that you’ve wanted to improve. Well, guess what—your direct reports probably think the same thing about you!

This article, and the one next week, will guide you into a dialogue with your direct reports that will give you plenty of information about how to be successful in serving them better!

Today’s article comes from an experience I recently had with a client company. Next week’s article is a recommendation I am making to those leaders for how they can extend the success they have already experienced.

First, let me provide context. Since the early 1980’s, Barry Posner and Jim Kouzes have been asking people what characteristics they look for in their bosses. Their efforts are described in their book The Leadership Challenge.

After over two decades of extensive testing, Kouzes and Posner distilled the list down to the top twenty categories. Using this list, they have interviewed over 20,000 individuals on four continents. The process now used is to ask individuals to select from among these twenty the qualities that they “most look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction they would willingly follow.”

The twenty characteristics are: ambitious, broad-minded, caring, competent, cooperative, courageous, dependable, determined, fair-minded, forward-looking, honest, imaginative, independent, inspiring, intelligent, loyal, mature, self-controlled, straightforward, and supportive.

Using this list, I asked each of the leaders at my client company to identify:

--What are the top five qualities that you desire in a boss?

--What are the top five qualities you think you possess?

I generated two matrices. Both show the names of each member of the leadership team and the characteristics they identified. One matrix showed what they desire in their boss. The other matrix showed what each person felt was true for him or her.

Imagine such a summary for your organization. Think about how you might use this valuable information with your leadership team. Imagine comparing your organization’s results with what Kouzes and Posner have found are the qualities we most value in our leaders.

**Being honest.** We want our leaders to be worthy of our trust—truthful, ethical, principled, and of high integrity.

**Being forward-looking.** Our leaders must have clarity of direction and purpose, driven by a concern for the future of the organization.

**Being inspiring.** Our leaders must be enthusiastic, energetic, and positive—a bit of a cheerleader encouraging us to enroll and commit to this worthy cause.

**Being competent.** Our leaders must be capable of guiding us to where we are headed, effectively executing leadership skills.

I realize you might be ready to charge forth and duplicate this process in your organization. Go to it!

Or, wait a week and consider a variation on this suggestion. If you can’t wait, call me and let’s talk about several ways you might energize your direct reports, those who look to you for direction!

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***Dennis Hooper is a leadership development coach, helping leaders build organizations of excellence. Call Dennis at 478-988-0237 or e-mail him at [dhooper2@juno.com](mailto:dhooper2@juno.com).***