

Learn To Distinguish Between Take-Charge Execs And Bullies

By [MOREY STETTNER](#) Posted 05:32 PM ET

Some leaders get great bottom-line production from staffers. Other executives work just as hard, if not harder, only to produce piddling results.

Why do some managers consistently outdo peers? The difference is their personality.

"How they treat people and how they get things done drive results," said **Becky Winkler**, principal at **Green Peak Partners**, an organizational consulting firm.

Some boards want to recruit hard-driving workaholics who set high targets for employees and exhibit a take-no-prisoners attitude. These tough-as-nails types show resilience, vision and thirst for battle.

There's one problem: Such demanding leaders alienate workers.

Winkler's firm collaborated on a study that found that executives who produce stellar results work well with people. Instead of bullying underlings, enlightened leaders listen respectfully to all sides and possess enough self-awareness to admit when they're wrong.

Dig Into The Past

When hiring a senior executive, pay attention in the interview to how the candidate refers to employees. Ideally, you want the person to recognize workers' efforts rather than adopt an "it was all me" tone.

"It's revealing if employees have followed the executive from job to job," said Winkler, who's based in Atlanta. "That's a sign of a well-liked boss."

To probe further into a candidate's people skills, don't just contact the listed references. Tell the executive at the outset, "We'll be contacting each of your past bosses." Then chronologically review all of the individual's recent jobs and check the correct spelling of the first and last name of each boss.

Ask the candidate, "What do you predict each former boss will say is your best and worst quality?" Using what Winkler calls the "TORC technique" or Threat of Reference Check, you signal to the executive that you want a full accounting of past work relationships.

How To Spot A Narcissist

Leaders with the right mix of interpersonal skills tend to handle conflict well without losing their composure. They're also receptive to criticism and gifted facilitators who encourage open debate.

"You want to attract leaders who energize employees by being positive," Winkler said. "They also need to be humble enough to admit what they don't know and balance their ability to compromise with a determination to push through roadblocks."

When assessing candidates, beware of narcissism. Narcissists can initially come across as charming and intelligent, Winkler warns.

But as you get to know them better, you find that they never share credit nor accept blame. They show no interest in collecting input from others and they lack empathy for peers and employees.

To raise your self-awareness, hire a coach or ask trusted outsiders to evaluate your personality. Then use 360-degree feedback within your firm to see how colleagues perceive you — and compare the results to what you learn from outsiders.