

UNDERCOVER BOSS, REALLY?

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So, according to CNN “U.S. job satisfaction hits 22-year low.” CNN says “Fewer than half of U.S. workers are satisfied with their jobs, the lowest level since record-keeping began 22 years ago, said a report released Tuesday. The Conference Board’s survey polled 5,000 households, and found that only 45% were satisfied in their jobs. That’s down from 61.1% in 1987, the first year the survey was conducted.” CNN goes on to say “Even though one in 10 Americans is out of a job, those who are employed are increasingly dissatisfied.” See

http://money.cnn.com/2010/01/05/news/economy/job_satisfaction_report/

Why is this, I wonder? Well, TV might just have the answer. TV you say? Yes, TV. I was watching some television last night and saw a commercial for a new show that is going to premier on CBS after the Super Bowl. It’s called “Undercover Boss.” Like most “reality” shows these days it looks like this one started in England and has now made its way to the U.S. I was intrigued by the 30 second spot, so I did some searching on the web to see what this thing is all about. According to the “The Wrap”, which bills itself as “Covering Hollywood” . . . “CBS executives believe they’ve got a winner in ‘Undercover Boss,’ a documentary-style show that moved some advertisers and other audience members to tears when it was previewed last May at the network’s upfront presentation.” The Wrap goes on to describe the show as following “CEOs from major companies as they go **undercover** to see how their companies really work.” Yes, I added the bold. I’m stunned. Tears? Really? A show about executives doing the “dirty work” moved people to tears? Really? Undercover? They are kidding right? You can see The Wrap post at <http://www.thewrap.com/ind-column/super-surprise-cbs-slots-undercover-boss-after-big-game-12049>

To say the least, I was intrigued. So I searched some more. The CBS website has some previews of this new show. http://www.cbs.com/primetime/undercover_boss/ The extended preview, which is about 5 minutes long, shows a CEO of well known company taking off his \$2,000 suit, getting into some jeans and a tee shirt, letting his beard grow for a couple of days and then learning how to sort cardboard, clean portable toilets and ride a garbage truck with his employees. In the short preview it seems he is not very good at it. It also seems he does not really know what is going on in his company. One employee rushes to the time clock to keep from getting docked “2 minutes for every minute she is late” and another seems to be doing at least three jobs while being paid for one. By the end of the clip, when the boss reveals his “true identity” to his employees he is handing out promotions and bonuses to these deserving employees.

Other than my normal gag reflex when it comes to reality TV I have nothing against this TV show. I haven’t even seen a whole episode yet. At least the executives gave it a try. Good for them. And no, I don’t expect the CEO to

know what is going on every day with all of his or her employees. But it is a real shame it took a TV show to get these CEOs out to see the operations they are in charge of. No wonder people were crying.

And no matter what else you might think of the show, it sure points out a glaring problem with at least some companies in this country. I mean come on, really, if you are a CEO or any other kind of boss, and I don't care how big your company is or how many people you employ, and you can walk into one of your plants, stores or hospitals and not have at least one of your employees recognize you immediately, **YOU ARE NOT DOING YOUR JOB!** Now, I don't care if you haven't shaved in a couple of days, or if you are wearing jeans and a tee shirt instead of a suit or if you are dressed like BOZO THE CLOWN. Every employee who works for you should at least know your face. I mean really, how does a CEO go "undercover" in his own company. And we wonder why employee job satisfaction is at a 22 year low?

I know you are busy. So are the people who work for you. Get out of your chair and go see them. They can't come see you. You can hire someone else to do your paperwork for you. You can't hire someone else to be you and say hello and acknowledge the people who make your company work.

My last job was for a family-owned company. It was founded by two local guys in a garage. It grew to be a multi-billion dollar company with thousands of employees in the span of a generation. When I worked there people told stories about how they would be sitting in their office working and look up and see one of the founders of the company standing at the door asking them what they were doing. It would be impossible to this day for these men to go "undercover" in their own company and it is equally impossible for their sons, who have now taken over to do so today. It just couldn't happen, everyone who works for the company knows who they are and most of the employees have met and talked to them. And it seemed to me, at least when I was there that most employees liked their jobs.

I'm sure there are a lot of reasons why employees are not satisfied with their jobs. Some of the reasons, let's face it, in these hard economic times you won't be able to fix. There is no money for raises or bonuses or benefit plans. So let's fix what we can. If you are a leader, be a visible one. Talk to your employees, give them a voice, and make the members of your management team do the same. After all, isn't that a big part of your job if you are an executive?

You don't have to wait for a TV show to introduce you to your employees. Go out and do it yourself.