

## **The Good Boss Checklist\***

\*Not a checklist. Do what makes sense for you and your team. Skip what doesn't. Also, you may have better ideas. Let's just call it a "list."

Note: We're not talking about HR policies and procedures – these are practical steps that you can take as a manager in a newsroom. Stuff that's worked for Kim and Eric.

### **About you**

1. Impostor syndrome means you're a good manager. You're always striving to do better by your team. Own it and live it, but remember: You earned this.
2. You will fail. But that's OK! Embrace failure, learning and iterating. ONA speakers have been telling you for years – decades? – to do this around digital journalism. It works for managing a team too.
3. Take care of yourself, too. This means setting boundaries. What are you willing to share, and how will you relate to your team? You can be friendly without being friends. Also, ask yourself: What triggers me? What do I need to remain grounded, productive and happy as a news leader?
4. Be vulnerable. You need to decide what you're comfortable with here, but being a good leader doesn't require perfection. You're not a robot. Show your flaws, your weaknesses, and how you've grown.
5. Model good work-life balance. Make sure they take breaks and days off that they have coming to them – and you do the same.
6. Know what you don't know. Your direct reports will know things you don't, and that's OK. Let them be the experts. And make sure they get the credit. Sing their praises from the rooftops, even, when you get the chance.
7. Take feedback. Ask for feedback and listen. You are not done being baked as a manager, and your team can (and should) help you grow as much as you help them, Good culture is a collaboration.
8. Be aware of your biases. As humans, we all have them – being conscious of this fact, and checking on your own biases as you make decisions, will help you manage your team in a way that's fair, equitable and supportive. The journalism will be better, too.

### **About the team and culture you create**

9. Know your resources. HR, Legal, your manager peers, your own boss, EAP, etc. You are not alone.
10. Onboarding: Have a detailed plan for welcoming new people to your team. Be consistent as new people come in.
11. Make time to meet. Schedule regular 1:1s with each person who reports to you. As much as possible, let them set the agenda.
12. Know your people, as individuals. What motivates them? Frustrates them? What are their career experiences and goals? Where do they have room for improvement? Respect them for who they are, and meet them where they are.

13. Have growth plans that are flexible. Things change as you learn more about people. Keep an internal check on who is growing, who needs to tread water, who you think could become the next you. This is succession, but also goals and individual growth.
14. Break the negativity cycle. Yes, we not-so-young journalists all have early-career stories about being treated badly by uncaring managers in a toxic newsroom. You don't need to pay this forward. If your direct reports are happier and better-treated than you were, that's a good thing.
15. Find the joy in your work. We journalists, and the work we're tasked to do, aren't always positive by nature – and you need to be authentic. But showing a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction and, when possible, joy in what you do is contagious and can help establish a positive culture among your team members.
16. Building culture is individual to each team. Everyone should contribute something to the vibe. If you know your people, and you know them well, you can read what works for the group in addition to individuals. Don't shoehorn culture ideas from books or others if they won't work for the people you have.
17. Hire thoughtfully. Got a chance to bring in someone new? This opportunity is a gift to be treasured and handled with great care. Yes, you want someone who can do the job. But they should also contribute to the positive culture you're nurturing. And leave the cookie cutter in the drawer – the work of journalism is done best by teams with a wide range of backgrounds, skills and life experiences.
18. Be conscious of burnout and trauma. Between intense work days, tricky schedules and focusing on unpleasant news developments, journalists are at risk. You're not a health professional, but you can always check in and ask how someone's doing or what they need to thrive. Also, don't wait for trauma to arrive – equip them ahead of time with tools and strategies to cope with it. See the resource list below for some ideas.
19. Be aware of online harassment and abuse. The risk is real, and journalists – particularly journalists of color and those who cover politics and other contentious topics – are often in the line of fire. Are your direct reports aware of this risk, and equipped to handle it, and to get help? Does your newsroom have a plan to respond? Sort this out now – don't wait for the next bad thing to happen. Again, see the list of resources below for some good starting points.
20. Peer-to-peer support is key. Encourage your team members to know each other, support each other and learn from each other. Schedule a social outing, and don't stay too long. They're going to need each other even more than they need you. H/T to Bruce Shapiro at the Dart Center: The No. 1 predictor of resilience in the face of trauma encountered by journalists is the quality of their peer support system.

## Resources

- [Charterworks](#) A great newsletter about the future of work
- [Management Tip of the Day from HBR](#) One tip each day, leads to really good, oft-forgotten HBR articles
- [Resources for Journalists Coping With Trauma](#) The Dart Center offers a wide range of self-care tips for journalists, including for coping with the trauma that can come with covering news. Note the “resources for managers” section. But read it all.

- [What Journalists Can Do for Mental Wellness Every Day](#) An NBCU Academy Q&A with psychiatrist Dr. Sue Varma
- [Online Abuse: A Self-Defence Guide](#) Another strong set of tips from the Dart Center
- [How to be an excellent leader in news](#) An infographic full of bonus tips from Dr. Alexandra Borchardt, director of leadership programmes at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University
- [Prioritizing mental health in the newsroom: How to create a culture of well-being](#) A recent webinar from the Shorenstein Center at Harvard University
- [Sincerely, Leaders of Color](#) A series led by P. Kim Bui and Emma Carew Grovum aimed at news industry leaders who care about “creating a more supportive environment for journalists of color to do their best work.”