



## Stanford eCorner

### Listen to Those You Lead

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2565/Listen-to-Those-You-Lead>

Bestselling author and Stanford professor Bob Sutton offers insights from his book, *Good Boss, Bad Boss*. Two important points: 1) Individuals in a position of authority will be under intense scrutiny from those they manage; and 2) Leaders receive disproportionately more blame and more credit for organizational performance. Sutton shares some surprising statistics related to this point, and explains that the best bosses work hard to remain in-tune with those they manage.



#### Transcript

The main point of this book, and to sort of back off, there's this thing that they sometimes say, and I've got examples of famous people like Jack Welch and one of the former deans of the business school saying that "When you're a boss, it's not all about you." Well, in fact, I think what that is is a useful half-truth. If you look at the evidence, when people are placed in a position of authority over others, actually, a number of things happen that in some ways it kind of is all about them. And so let me give you kind of two things. One is the quote implies there's a lot of evidence of what's called the 'magnification effect' sometimes, the notion that when you're in a position of power, the people who you lead watch your every move very closely. I'll talk about that in more detail in a second. And then there's also evidence--and this is the lot in life for every leader on earth--if you're in a position of authority over others--especially a senior executive, but it happens to everybody--you will get more blame and more credit than you deserve for organizational performance. And so sort of like backing up, so the numbers are sort of off--and I tried to guess. I read a lot of articles and there's so much ideology around this it's hard to tell, but it sort of looks to me on average leaders are good for about 15% of performance of a group or organization, which is shockingly low given how much people talk about leadership, and on average they get about 50% of the blame and credit. So if you go back to being a leader, essentially, when you're in a leadership position over others, just a few people, a lot of people, one, it is all about you because they're paying a lot of attention to you, and two, your lot in life is you're getting more credit and more blame than you deserve. So the point, and kind of the main point of the book, is that the best bosses realize in some ways that it is a lot about them, and they work very hard to be in tune with how others are responding to them.

So not for egotistical reasons, but because that's kind of like one of their core job responsibilities.