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Stanford Engineering Professor Bob Sutton, author of "The No Asshole Rule" and the follow-up "The Asshole Survival Guide," critiques the notion that tyrannical bosses are essential for success. Having devoted his career to discovering how organizations can change for the better, Sutton describes how hot-tempered business leaders ultimately undermine productivity and performance by abusing employees and driving them away.



Transcript

So we can talk about whether or not it's better to be, whether or not assholes are sometimes winners.. Tom actually even set me up on that.. The way the book starts out is I start out with a real story.. I did this conversation, it's a classic thing, we did a research interview on scaling with the CEO of a startup.. And after I turned off the recording and put away my iPhone, the guy looks at me, this is 2011, and he says, "So, I'm really worried that I'm not gonna be a great CEO "because I'm not nasty enough.. "I'm not enough like Steve Jobs." And he said, "What do you think?" And I assured him there are many people in Silicon Valley who are successful without being nasty, and also, in the book, some of you may, some years ago, we had Ed Catmull come here and speak, so I've gotten to know Ed Catmull fairly well.. Ed is the president of Pixar and the president of Disney Animation Studios, so he spent a lot of time with Steve Jobs in his life.. And his argument, he fact checked this and we went back and forth, his argument about Steve is that the Steve Jobs who built Apple, who's Pixar, who became the great Steve Jobs, was maybe not like the nicest person in the world, but was a much less jerkier person than he was when he was younger.. So even he learned to calm down before he could be successful.. So I think that's the argument..

So my argument is still, if you're an asshole and a winner, you're still a loser as a human being, because if you look at the evidence, even if it's helping you win because you're in a I win, you lose, zero sum game, you're inflicting deteriorating physical and mental health on others, and as I said at the beginning of the talk, you are literally undermining the productivity, driving away the people who you need to be successful in your role as a leader.. Okay, so that's the end of my prepared remarks.. I think we're ready for questions.. All right? Am I good on time? Thank you.. (audience applauds) All right.. So, if you must leave, now is a good time.. So questions.. How do we do questions? - [Tom] You pick.. - So raise your hand and I'll repeat them.. Yes sir, right in the front row here..

- [Man In Audience] Is there a health benefit as an asshole? - Does it help the asshole? - [Man In Audience] No.. Is there health benefit? - To be an ass? So the evidence is, there's actually-- - [Tom] (mumbles) question, repeat it.. - Sop the question is basically, is being an asshole good for your health?..