


# Boss Or Coach?

By John Wyckoff  
You Make The Call!



**F**ew dealerships run as smoothly as the owner would like. By the same token, if there's one comment I hear most often from the employees of a powersports dealership, it's issues with and complaints about the owner if he (or she) is active and plays the part of "The Boss."

One of the harshest criticisms goes something like this: "He thinks he knows everything, but he's really out of touch and doesn't know as much as he thinks he does." Another common one is: "If he'd just let me do my job instead of micro-managing everything." Still another says; "He tells me to do it his way or hit the highway, and his way is old school." Sad to say some of these comments are valid. I could add others like, "He just won't listen," or "He's so inconsistent." The problems are not the result of sinister motives, but the desire of the boss to stay in control and in touch. As a result, the boss is working **in not on** the business. As I've written before, that's not a good idea.

It has been almost impossible to come up with a comprehensive job description for someone who has assumed the title of "boss" simply because they own the business and write the checks.

When I conduct dealer principal training programs, I like to start by asking them to tell me the title of the most important person on a football or basketball team. No one has ever said it was the owner (read boss). Instead, the vast majority say it is the coach. Then I ask who they think makes the most money.

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The feedback starts with comments relating to the multi-million dollar contracts some uniquely skilled players command. Then there is a general consensus that it is the player with the highest profile or the greatest skills and talents.

I then suggest that the owner of the team is probably the best paid. After all, he or she has to pay many of the team members those multi-million dollar salaries. The net

profits from ticket and program sales, as well TV and radio contracts, food and sometimes parking fees, goes to the owner, whether he or she is an individual or corporation. Most professional sports franchises are very valuable, which would lead one to believe they are also very profitable.

If you agree with my contention so far, then let's talk about the coach — in sports and in your business. Professional sports teams have the advantage because they have someone with the official title of coach. I'm not aware of any powersports dealership with anyone designated as coach. What would the qualifications be? That person would be highly trained, a leader and have the confidence of the team and owner. His role is very clear: develop a winning team. He never plays in the game. Instead he plays the role of mentor, motivator.

How can a person be considered the coach in a dealership? A coach is a mentor, a strategic planner and a motivator all rolled into one. His or her generally accepted title might be boss, GM or perhaps even sales manager. It all depends on the skill sets that include all of these important attributes.

What are a good coach's greatest skills? Listening and understanding; motivating and mentoring. What does that mean? It means the coach has the most important job in the dealership. Staffers go to the coach to find out what they must learn to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively. It doesn't mean the coach knows how to do every job in the dealership, but it does mean his or her job is to direct the staff member to get the training or information he or she needs.

The coach arbitrates conflicts, and knows the strengths and weaknesses of each staff member. The coach in larger dealerships may be the one person who can effectively stand between and act as a buffer for staff and the owner. So far it sounds simple doesn't it? It is, under the right circumstances.

If the dealership is relatively small, say, fewer than 20 employees, the coach is most often the owner. In larger dealerships, the coach is most often the GM. A good coach has his ego in check. He or she isn't interested in being the "hero." Instead he wants the employees to take that role. He or she supports the boss and at the same time, helps the boss become a better time and vision manager.

No one person, owner or coach, can be all things to all people. The market paradigms are changing too fast for that. If not exposed to the day-to-day interaction and activities, the boss can soon become out of touch with the reality of today's business.

Just how involved is the boss in medium to large businesses? Not nearly as much as you might imagine. Donald Trump has enough time to go to parties, do TV programs and sit in on endless board of directors meetings for more than a few companies. His job is to see the "big picture" and have his managers buy into his philosophy of how to mentor subordinates.

The OEM big brass may visit the factory, but they don't operate the machinery or interrupt the flow of production. If they see something they feel is not quite right, they inform the appropriate manager to look into it, not change it, but determine why it's being done in a particular way.

I don't mean to get too abstract here, but I believe an owner or GM (or whoever assumes the mantle of coach) must first of all be a "people person." Next, he or she must be a skilled communicator while being pragmatic.

I don't see a downside if a person has these skills, but doesn't have a background in the powersports industry. That may be why some very successful dealers like Bob Dron in Oakland, California, and Ray Price in Raleigh, North Carolina, hired GMs who came from outside the industry. It also may explain why Clark Vitulli, president/CEO of America's PowerSports, has been so successful as he's acquired dealerships of all brands in all parts of the country. Although he may ride motorcycles now, he came from the automotive industry.

As the powersports industry continues to consolidate and become more professional, I urge you to consider the need for someone to accept the role of coach. Select him or her carefully — that position will be one of the, if not the, most important in your dealership, just as it is in the professional sports world. 🏍️