

A manager, supervisor, team-leader is caught between a top and the bottom. Often, those above want you to “keep the troops in line” – control, no “problems”, maintain the budget, keep costs under control, get more from the workers for less pay – you are a “company man.”

But those under your supervision want something different – they want:

- first, for you to leave them alone [give them autonomy],
- let them do their work YET
- stick up for them AND
- get them more money AND
- better working conditions AND
- promotion.

What should you do? If you side only with the company everyone knows that everything you say is “the company line.” Your reputation with the workforce is “unbelievable.” People listen respectfully to you, and, perhaps, nod their heads in agreement, BUT they neither hear what you say or believe it.

Rachel runs a “smooth ship” and refers to her subordinates as “my family.” Yet they have not had a salary increase in 8 years, and Rachel does not intend to get them one. Still “we are family.” It is quite clear what Rachel stands for, whatever she says.

OR you take the opposite side, and represent the workers views and get a reputation for being a softy, a pushover, not tough enough. The folks at the bottom “love you,” but the folks at the top can predict your position and, often, dismiss it.

The phrase “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” applies. You are caught between two sets of conflicting demands and if you are going to be successful you must sometimes take position neither the company nor your direct reports like or want to hear.

On a summer internship I encountered a hard-nosed manager in a paper plant in the Midwest. Bob got results, he was a tough-guy, a no-nonsense type of manager. One week during his management meeting he described the work force and after came into the intern's office and asked, "How did I do?" I was young and naïve and said, "Bob, I got your message, squeeze hard and long." His face turned red and he left the room to go see his #2. Who told him, "Bob, that is always how you come across." So Bob turned his weekly report over to the #2.

As my internship ended he invited me into his office for a drink. And confided, Vince Lombardi was the greatest manager ever." As he rambled on I noted that he needed an "opponent" in order to manage.

Three weeks after I returned to grad school the workers voted in the teamsters union. Two weeks later there was a firebombing IN A PAPER MILL. And one day later the corporate jet flew out of Cincinnati, and, to this day, Bob, although he is still a senior manager, is always accompanied by a Senior HR VP.



**FEAR WORKS:**  
**A GOOD BOSS SETS AN EXAMPLE,**  
**A GREAT BOSS SCARES THE HELL OUT OF**  
**YOU**