



## THE BOSS AND HIS FRIENDS

One of my friends have recently asked me: “Would you invite the guys from your company, with whom you worked together for a long time in the same department and whose boss you are now, for a barbecue?”

And the answer from the professional Consultant was: “It depends...” and before I continued talking I realized that there isn’t a clear YES or NO. So it took me really some time to consider all pros and cons for a proper answer...

Years ago some of my colleagues and I used to go out for a so - called “Friday-after-work beer”, reviewing the business week and complained from time to time about our boss, because “I would have done this totally different...” or “...he doesn’t understand our problems at all...”

Some of us spent together weekends for doing sports: skiing, biking and playing tennis. And naturally, it was no question at all within our team to celebrate birthdays or other occasions like promotions at the university together.

Years later our company was looking for a new Division Head and I have been chosen as the proper candidate for that position. Many things changed in my life and especially in my business-related environment: I became part of a “new” management team with new responsibilities, got to know another society and had less time for my “old” colleagues.

It came to my mind on a Friday evening – after I have already been acquainted with my new position – suddenly I recognized that I missed something: my friends and our “Friday-after-work beer”.

**But are they still my friends, although I’m now their boss?** Do they want to go out with me and if yes, would they be honest to me, when talking about our company? These questions and several other thoughts crossed my mind on this Friday evening.

Yes, I believe that in case a colleague has now been appointed as superior of his former colleagues, the – let’s say – private relationship should not be given up. But of course under certain considerations:

**Your colleagues, or better your friends, are not allowed to take you and your position as an advantage,** neither for their personal profit nor as a “communication channel”. I realized this several times, when associates, who felt very close to me, tried to distribute certain messages through me to other managers, but the questions are in that respect: “Are messages like these ones really objective?” and “Is this the professional way of communication?”



On the other hand it could also be a disadvantage for a co-worker being in a friendly relationship to his superior. He will immediately get impressed a seal and whenever good results are achieved, enviers will just say: **“...it’s anyhow just because he’s the friend of our boss!”** And in the worst case this employee will get into deep troubles once his superior leaves – regardless of the reason – just because of their relationship.

You should keep your friendship exclusively with reasonable associates: Imagine, some of your team members and you went together on a biker’s tour last weekend, and the guys were sharing their experience during lunch with other colleagues. **I could imagine that the rest of your team, that hasn’t been invited, would feel unprivileged or even as the second-class colleagues...**

Last but not least I would recommend you as a manager is to be very careful with nominations, promotions or salary increases: **employees should deserve it because of their results, but not because of their good relationship with you.**

On the contrary, if you as a manager are joining a new company, I would suggest you to keep certain distance from “friendships in the office”. Why? Because people, **especially those who envy you, are watching you and all your activities closely** and sometimes, facts and emotions are mixed up totally. This usually leads then to rumours and gossips and will for sure not support your reputation (not talking about lost resources, because those kinds of people rather enjoy gossiping than doing their business).

Imagine people talking in the smoking area or in the coffee bar: “Did you hear, our boss went out with ... last Friday...” or “I would like to know what our colleagues told our boss during the break of the football game about our department...”

**The whole story could become even more complicated, if there would be both, female and male among your “friends”.** Gossips would not just be limited to certain hobbies or leisure activities, also interpersonal relationships would be responsible for so-called Chinese whisper: “I believe that our boss has a liaison with..., did you already hear about it?” ... and for such things there is barely any space in business!

Of course, if there are official occasions like annual works outings or corporate events, you as a manager have to join it. This does not seem that you are favouring someone over the others, on the contrary, all employees and invitees respectively are on the same level.

So, if my friend would have now read this article, he would – at least I hope so – understood my message: **“Please, don’t break your friendship with your associates** just because of the fact that you became their boss, but be careful, if also they understand properly **to differentiate between friendship and business!”**