

# Calling your bluff: Supervisors easily sniff out what drives a worker

March 6 2015

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Good supervisors aren't easily duped by the motives of underlings who go the extra mile - they know when an employee is sucking up to them because of personal ambition, or when such actions truly have what's best for the organization at heart. This is one of the insights from a study in Springer's *Journal of Business and Psychology*, led by Magda Donia of the University of Ottawa in Canada.

Supervisors play an important role in making decisions about rewards and promotions within an organization. They should therefore be able to effectively distinguish between so-called "good soldiers" or "good actors," to ensure that workers receive the recognition they deserve. Members of both groups are able to participate in positive organizational citizenship behavior in the workplace that goes beyond the mere basics of their job description. Whereas the "soldiers" actions are selflessly motivated by helping the organization and colleagues, "actors" are more self-servingly focused on furthering themselves.

Donia, along with co-authors Gary Johns from Concordia University, and Usman Raja from Brock University, tested whether supervisors can indeed successfully spot a good actor from a good soldier. Their study was conducted in 21 branches of an English-speaking multinational bank in Pakistan. Surveys were completed by 197 bank tellers and cashiers, and their 47 immediate supervisors.

They found that supervisors know with relative accuracy when employees' organizational citizenship behavior is selflessly or self-

servingly motivated. This dispels concerns that the wrong judgment by supervisors might lead to the unfair reward or punishment of their subordinates.

Previous findings show that supervisors tend to prefer good soldiers from good actors. This study builds on these conclusions by suggesting that supervisors may have good reason for doing so. This might be because selfless and self-serving workers differ in the quality of what they contribute to an organization.

In light of this, Donia advises that it might therefore be more effective and meaningful for their own long term advancement in a company if employees selflessly work within an organizational setting.

"Supervisors are able to accurately identify the motives behind their subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior, and they are not fooled by good actors," says Donia.

**More information:** Donia, M. et al (2015). Good Soldier or Good Actor? Supervisor Accuracy in Distinguishing between Selfless and Self-Serving OCB Motives, *Journal of Business and Psychology*. DOI: [10.1007/s10869-015-9397-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-015-9397-6)

Provided by Springer

Citation: Calling your bluff: Supervisors easily sniff out what drives a worker (2015, March 6) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-bluff-supervisors-easily-worker.html>

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