

You Don't Really Have a Boss



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"One Voluntarist's Perspective" is an original column appearing most Mondays at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Anarchism is the argument that rulers are illegitimate and immoral. Anarchists are those who oppose some people ruling over others. As a voluntarist, I am also an anarchist. Some anarchists, however, also oppose hierarchy. Now obviously, if the "archy" that we are talking about is ruler-based, as in a state, then all anarchists are in agreement. But if the "archy" that we are talking about is not ruler-based, such as you find in a business firm in a free market, then all anarchists are not in agreement. I, for one, do not consider corporate hierarchy to be illegitimate or immoral. Here's why.

Everyone is Self-Employed

While it is true that the state steals a portion of my income and wealth, and while it is also true that the state makes it difficult if not sometimes impossible for me to start my own business, I am not a slave, and so I am free to choose with who I will sell the services I am skilled to produce. Whether or not I am selling my services directly to consumers, I am selling my services directly to customers. If I am employed by a corporation, the corporation is my customer. Therefore, relative to my customer, I am self-employed. Everyone else is likewise.

Corporate Bosses

The corporation to which I sell my services is organized in an hierarchical manner. I and a few others report directly (are accountable to) to our "supervisor", who's paid for his supervising skills. The supervisor in turn reports directly to our department's "director", who's likewise paid for his directing skills. The director reports to our division's "general manager", paid for his general managing skills, and so and so forth, until you arrive at top, the "Chief Executive Office". Or do you? Actually, the CEO reports to the Board of Directors, who report to the shareholders, who report, ultimately, to consumers. Now, it's not really quite this black and white, but I think this portrayal is good enough. At every level, from supervisor to CEO to consumers, we have what are called "bosses".

But You Don't Really Have a Boss

A boss is “a person in charge of a worker or organization”. Clearly then, unless we are in charge of ourselves at work, we all have a boss. My supervisor gives me tasks and reviews my performance. For all intents and purposes, he is “in charge” of me. Therefore, he is my boss. Right? Actually, no. My relationship to my supervisor is really provider/customer, not worker/boss. Though my supervisor is not directly purchasing my services, he does represent the organization that is. As a free person who sells his services to the highest bidder, my supervisor, and the company that he represents, are my customers, not my bosses. This is an important distinction to remember when considering your options as a producer. Your employer is not really in charge of you. You are in charge of yourself. If your customer is no longer valuable to you, you are free to find new customers for your services. That makes *you* the boss.

Final Thoughts

Anarchists who oppose non-ruler-based hierarchy seem to not realize the voluntary, entrepreneurial foundation of corporate, or business, hierarchy. Every person at every level of the organization is freely selling his services. Hierarchy used this way is a misnomer, for there is no “archy” at all. While I am not opposed to the claim that corporate hierarchy may not survive in a truly free market, I fail to see the point in railing against it instead of directing our energies toward the institution preventing a truly free market, the state. If corporate hierarchy is illegitimate and immoral, it's only because the state limits the options of workers, not because of corporate hierarchy itself.

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