

# Employees' car choices don't go unnoticed by their bosses

By Del Jones  
USA TODAY

Is it a wise career move to show up at work in a car that's nicer than the one your boss drives?

## Management

Depends on which CEO you ask. Forty-four company leaders responding to an informal USA TODAY survey said they had an opinion on the question, and 26 of them said it was OK to pull into the parking lot driving wheels a cut above. That would fit the image of CEOs as free-market disciples who allow underlings to

buy what they want — even if they upstage the boss.

However, 18 advised against it, mostly because it signals irresponsibility and a lack of judgment.

Yet, a few said they go so far as to encourage employees to buy cars out of their league because expensive tastes and debt motivate. "It shows they have goals and ambitions to aspire to, and maybe catch up with," says Dave Young, CEO of mattress manufacturer Vymac, who drives a 12-year-old BMW.

Robert McGovern, CEO of job-fox.com, drives an '06 BMW. He says he "works" his salesmen by

telling them that they deserve a new car. "Go treat yourself to that Beemer you've always wanted," he tells them. (McGovern founded CareerBuilder.com, now jointly owned by Tribune, McClatchy and USA TODAY parent Gannett.)

But Paul Holstein, COO of Cable-Organizer.com and an '07 Lexus driver, worries that over-extended workers expose the company to fraud and other risk. "I wonder about an employee's financial maturity if they drive too nice a vehicle. If it's above their means, I question the source of funds and will monitor that employee's work

more closely."

"It always makes me laugh when I see some guy drive up in an extremely expensive car he can bare-

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ly afford," says Richard Hanks, president of Mindshare Technologies, who drives an '02 Toyota.

"They could use a financial adviser. An expensive new car is one of the worst investments one can make," says Jim Holland, CEO of Backcountry.com, who drives an

'05 Subaru Outback.

"Nuts, they should be saving for the future," says John Pugh, president of Cortech Engineering, who drives a 2004 Lincoln Navigator.

None of the CEOs say they are jealous, even though "envy is part of the human condition," says Penn State management professor Donald Hambrick and co-author of the paper "It's All About Me: Narcissistic CEOs and their Effects on Company Strategy and Performance."

Hambrick says he's unaware of research addressing CEO jealousy of subordinates' possessions. "I think we could reasonably expect

that narcissistic CEOs can't stand to be outshined," and that employees of narcissistic CEOs who arrive in nicer cars could suffer "denigration, smaller raises, slower promotions, and possibly dismissal."

"Drive the Ferrari on weekends, and don't brag to the boss about getting your kid into the Ivy League," Hambrick advises.

In some cases, it could be difficult to find a cheaper car than the boss drives. A survey of C-level executives by TheLadders.com job site said that 5% are "a little embarrassed" because they drive the worst car in the lot.