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Career Coach Strategies to Deal With a Difficult Boss

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The relationship with your boss can be one of the greatest determinants of job satisfaction. The [2013 Kelly Global Workforce Index](#) found that 63% of respondents felt that their direct managers have a significant impact on their level of satisfaction and engagement.

However, as many of our [career coaching](#) clients can attest, navigating this relationship isn't always easy.

DO YOU RECOGNIZE THIS BOSS?



Unfortunately, some bosses can exhibit challenging behaviors that can create a tricky workplace terrain. Following are some common difficult boss types — and strategies to enhance your working relationship:

The Micromanager — This type of boss has a need for control. The key to keeping a micromanager happy is being proactive and having a frank discussion about how and when he prefers to receive updates. Propose a weekly meeting to review your projects and the status of each. Create an agenda to help keep the meeting on topic.

If your boss has a better idea of what you're working on and knows that you'll be following up again soon, it can help ease his mind and prove that you're on top of your projects without as much supervision.

In learning how to deal with a micromanaging boss, remember that communication and clarity are essential — if you anticipate that you won't meet a deadline or a problem arises, let him be the first to know, and make sure you propose solutions along with information about the problem.

The Power-Hungry — Ego is a major driver for this person. She seeks attention, validation and recognition. Try to positively reinforce her behavior when you find it helpful and effective by thanking her. Ask for her opinion once in a while to make her feel valued.

Typically, this boss wants things done her way, but blindly following someone else's lead can result in disaster. Pick your battles, and when suggesting a change or making a request, try to frame it in a way that helps her see what she'll gain by supporting your idea.

The Screamer — This boss wants to be heard. Whenever possible, acknowledge that you understand what he is saying, rephrase it and repeat it back to him. If he comes to see that you are **listening** and following through, in time, he may lower his volume and intensity.

In extreme situations, calmly tell him that yelling at you is not productive, say that you will continue the conversation after you have both had time to collect your thoughts and then leave the room. You don't have to be **bullied at work**.

The Buddy — This person wants to be everyone's friend. She may want to chat throughout the day, inquire about your personal life and even get together outside of work. Of course, you want to gain your boss's trust and respect and, to a certain extent, engaging in some personal conversations with her can be a wise investment, but be sure to establish boundaries. Also, be mindful of other co-workers who may become jealous and feel that you are receiving special treatment if you and your boss become too friendly.

In addition, this type of boss is often uncomfortable with confrontation, but there will be times when you need her to rock the boat. This could mean standing up for you, pushing back against another department, or simply saying "no" to an unrealistic request. You want to be on good terms with your boss, but not so close that you feel as though you can't respectfully challenge her once in a while.

CAREER COACH INSIGHTS: SEEK SOLUTIONS — NOT CATEGORIES

The key to getting along with your boss, regardless of the challenges inherent to their style, is to foster a relationship of reciprocal respect and open communication.

Nancy Scheel, a career and executive coach who runs our Atlanta office, urges clients to use caution when tempted to categorize anyone — especially their boss.

"On the surface, labeling people by their difficult behaviors may appear to provide a useful shorthand to a solution," she explains. "However, two people can exhibit the same difficult behavior, yet for different reasons and with different triggers."

That makes solutions trickier. There are no 'one-size-fits-all' remedies.

"When you have a boss — or a colleague — whose behaviors are difficult or toxic, it's natural to conclude that the person is simply a jerk. And they may be! But the more we let our thoughts be consumed with these thoughts, the more our own feelings take over, and the more we actually contribute to our own depletion of energy and motivation," she says.



Rather, Nancy recommends striving for a deeper understanding of the individual — and of your own unique reactions to the behaviors. She encourages career coaching clients to see the *human* side of the ‘difficult’ boss.

Understanding that the ugly behavior is coming from somewhere — whether insecurity, fear, pain or suffering — doesn’t condone it, but can help you consider it in a larger context. She also suggests reflecting on your own contributions to the situation to minimize any ways that you may inadvertently be throwing additional flame on the fire.

“Ultimately, the goal is to create energy, objectivity and clarity *within yourself* — because that’s what you can control,” Nancy says. That insight can help you determine what is actually possible in this particular situation: how you can best protect yourself *and* get the best possible work results under the circumstances.”

What strategies have helped improve your relationship with a difficult boss?

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