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# Dealing With a Bad Boss: Strategies for Coping



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Years ago, when I was a marketing manager at *People Magazine*, we had a boss who drove all his employees nuts. “Pete” would start wandering the hallways at 4:30 to make sure no one left work before 5, he would give assignments but then micromanage them to death, he seemed to enjoy being in everyone’s business, and he rarely gave good performance reviews — unless somehow it reflected back on him. We referred to him as Napoleon Pete. All-in-all, Pete drove everyone in the department crazy, and little-by-little just about every member of the department left. Pete is a

perfect example of the workplace axiom that job-seekers join great companies but leave because of bad bosses.

Maybe you have a boss who is sexist or racist. Or perhaps a boss who takes all the credit for himself. Maybe your boss thinks you have no life outside work and makes you stay late everyday. Or perhaps a boss who gives out too many tasks with impossible to meet deadlines (or constantly changing deadlines). Maybe your boss is a pathological liar. Or perhaps the boss plays favorites.

Bad bosses — whether ogres, control freaks, jerks, micromanagers, or bumbling fools — can be found in all organizations. Pop culture loves to make fun of bad bosses, from the pointy-haired boss in the Dilbert comic strip, to the completely insipid boss from “The Office,” to the anal-compulsive and mean boss of the movie *Office Space*... but bad bosses are no laughing matter when you have to face him or her every working day. And, unfortunately, with the rightsizing of the last several years, there are probably more overworked and undertrained bosses than ever. It’s also possible, though, that bad bossing is just part of the organization’s corporate culture.

One study found that almost 80 percent of the employees surveyed identified their boss as a lousy manager. And almost 70 percent in that study conducted by Delta Road stated that their immediate superior had “no clue” what to do to become a good manager. Author Harvey Hornstein, Ph.D., estimates that 90 percent of the U.S. work force has been subjected to abusive behavior at some time. He bases his conclusions on a survey of nearly 1,000 workers over eight years.

So, what can you do if you are working for a bad boss? This article will provide you with the tools you need to manage the situation as best you can, but remember that sometimes the only solution is transferring to a different part of the company — or switching employers.

### **Make sure you are doing everything right**

The first solution is an honest analysis of your actions and behavior. How have you been handling yourself in your job? Have you always taken the high road, or have you resorted to occasional backstabbing, gossiping, or underperforming? If you’re human, it’s likely your bad boss has affected your performance, so try ignoring all these distractions and focus on your work to see if that changes anything. Find other sources of positive reinforcement for doing your job to the best of your abilities.

### **Compile a list of bad boss behaviors**

The second solution is a bit more involved, but should be a cathartic experience for you. Make a list of all the things that your boss does that drive you nuts. Let the list sit for a few days and then review it again, adding or deleting activities upon further reflection. Next, rank the list from most annoying to least annoying. Pick the top two or three worst offenses and develop some suggestions for how your boss could act differently in those situations. Edit the suggestions to remove sarcasm or anger. Show the suggestions to a trusted friend who has no vested interest in the situation. Edit the suggestions again.

Once you feel comfortable that your suggestions are positive and helpful, consider scheduling a meeting with your boss to discuss. Perhaps suggest meeting outside the office for breakfast or lunch. Leave your emotions at the door, but be prepared for your boss to have an emotional reaction. It’s possible that your boss is unaware of his/her actions, and this meeting could be very positive for all involved; however, it’s also possible that the meeting will end badly.

### **Keep a journal of incidents**

The third solution involves documenting each bad behavior of your boss in a journal. Don’t judge or write emotional reactions; simply document the facts of the situation and how the bad behavior impacted your performance — as well as others in the department. Again, this process may be enough to relieve you of the stress so that you can cope. However, at some point in the future — perhaps as you are leaving for a new job — you might consider taking the journal to a trusted colleague in human resources or even a mentor within the company.

### **Find a mentor with the company**

If you love the company but hate the boss, another solution is to develop a mentoring relationship with a boss/supervisor in another part of the company. Mentoring is a fantastic strategy that you should consider even if you have a good boss because a mentor is someone who can help you in

many ways, from offering advice to suggesting you for a promotion. And in coping with a bad boss, a mentor can be a good sounding board for you, and perhaps after you have documented all the offenses, someone who has the pull and the power to do something about your bad boss.

### **Report your bad boss**

A last resort is reporting the bad actions/performance of your boss to his/her supervisor — or to someone in human resources. While logic would hold that the company would not want a manager who is hurting performance or productivity, the reality is often that you become branded as a trouble-maker/whiner/complainer and your days at the company quickly become numbered.

### **Don't sacrifice your health or self-esteem**

The worst thing you can do is simply to do nothing, hoping the problems will get resolved. No job, boss, or company is worth losing your health, sanity, or self-esteem. If you can't find a way to resolve these issues and/or your boss simply will never change his/her behavior, you should immediately start working your network and begin looking for a new job — within or outside the organization. Again, if you love the company, a transfer might be the best option — but keep in mind that your boss might be as evil as to sabotage that transfer. And try not to quit before you find a new job, but again, if work just becomes too unbearable, you may need to consider quitting to save yourself.

### **Other Sources of Advice on Coping/Dealing With a Bad Boss**

Here are some other good sources of advice and suggestions in dealing with a bad boss:

[Beware of Bad Boss](#), by Chris Ott.

[Dealing With Bad, Ineffective Managers and Bosses](#), from About.com.

[Dealing with Difficult Bosses](#) by Amy Schurr.

[Ten Things That Bad Managers Do](#), by Cyndi Maxey.

[5 Types of Bad Boss and How to Handle Them](#).

[Ten Things Only Bad Managers Say](#), by Liz Ryan at Bloomberg Businessweek.

Finally, find some other great tips and suggestions in our [Do's and Don'ts of Dealing With a Bad Boss](#).

## **Not All Bosses Are Bad**

As much as we like to complain about our bosses, a recent survey found that 79 percent of workers respect their bosses a great deal. The survey, by accounting and financial staffing company Ajilon Finance, also asked what were the most important traits for a boss to possess:

Leading by example

Strong ethics or morals

Knowledge of the business

Fairness

Overall intelligence and competence

Recognition of employees

Questions about some of the terminology used in this article? Get more information (definitions and links) on key college, career, and job-search terms by going to our [Job-Seeker's Glossary of Job-Hunting Terms](#).

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