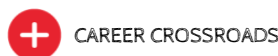


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DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT BOSS You can do something.



By Julie Cohen, Professional Certified Coach

Does Your Boss Drive You Nuts?

One of the most important factors in determining an employees' satisfaction is the relationship with their immediate supervisor. According to Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman in *First, Break All the Rules* (http://www.amazon.com/First-Break-All-Rules-Differently/dp/0684852861/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1282224039&sr=1-1), your supervisor "defines and pervades your work environment. If she sets clear expectations, knows you, trusts you and invests in you, then you can forgive the company its lack of profit-sharing program. But if your relationship with your manager is fractured, then no amount of in-chair massaging or company-sponsored dog walking will persuade you to stay and perform."

If you are blessed with a fantastic boss – one who is supportive, encouraging, competent, and confident, who wants you to be successful and cares about your professional advancement – then you've hit the jackpot. Nurture this relationship and work hard to show that your boss's investment in you is worthwhile to him/her. Unfortunately, not everyone's boss is close to this ideal.

The following are examples of difficult bosses and how you can make working for this person more manageable. If you are dealing with one of these situations, this should give you some ideas in how to manage more effectively. If you haven't faced these challenging situations, you may in the future and this will arm you with tools to help you. And, if you are a boss, read on to make sure you are giving your direct reports what they need to excel.

The Micromanager

The Micromanager boss wants to know everything you do. He expects to be copied on all emails, included in all decision making and be kept aware of all happenings. He says he does this so he'll be prepared and be able to support you if needed, but it feels like he doesn't trust you and does not care about your professional development. It's hard work working for a Micromanager. Keeping him in the loop, responding to detailed requests for information and never knowing when he'll drop in with more instructions on how to do your job requires energy that could be better spent elsewhere.

How to handle the Micromanager?

As the Micromanager often believes he's doing the right thing, talking to him can have an impact. This is where the concept of "managing-up" comes in. Managing up is when you explain to your boss how to best support you; you teach him how to be a better boss for you.

Arrange a time to speak with your boss when you can focus on you and your performance. Don't just pop in to his office and make this an unplanned conversation. You'll want to talk to him about what's working and not working for you in regards to your ability to successfully complete your job responsibilities. You don't want to tell him what he does wrong and why it ruins your life. You want to frame this as a win-win-win. Good for you, good for him and good for your organization.

Here's how to start the conversation:

"Bob, I would like to talk to you about ways for me to be more effective. I understand you want to be informed about the work I'm doing. I would like to update you once a week in a more thorough way instead of giving you daily updates. This will allow me to focus more on my clients and give you the information you want, too."

Notice that there is no blaming, anger or frustration expressed. You're aware of Bob's needs, stating what would be better for you and offer a possible solution. If Bob doesn't agree to your request, you've at least started a conversation in a positive manner.

The Incompetent

The Incompetent boss makes you question how she ever got to where she is. She doesn't seem to understand your business, your responsibilities or her own, or how to get things done within your organization. She often appears to be covering up her challenges, and she may even take credit for your successes. With an Incompetent boss, you are often drained and frustrated, either from figuring out how to get the support you need or trying to get recognized for your accomplishments through the fog of your boss's lack there of.

How to handle the Incompetent?

It's not your job to fix your boss. Don't waste your time and energy making her look better, nor bad-mouthing her to other colleagues. Focus on doing your job well and looking for opportunities to get acknowledgement elsewhere. This may mean networking within your organization to find advocates and mentors.

If your boss is getting accolades for work that you've accomplished, this provides a setting for you to address her directly. An Incompetent boss often works from a fearful place, worried about getting 'found out.'

Stating your concern and your expectation will raise her awareness and encourage her to be fair. You can't change her incompetence but you can encourage honesty. An example might be *"Sue, I noticed at the last staff meeting you did not mention that I did the research and wrote the report that the Vice President complemented you on. I'd appreciate it if you would clear up the misunderstanding about my contributions immediately."*

There is no threat here, just sharing with your boss what you observed and that you expect equity. If she doesn't respond appropriately, or if her incompetence is getting in the way of your effectiveness, you may need to address this issue within the framework of your organization's grievance process.

The Sabotager

Unlike the Micromanager and the Incompetent, The Sabotager takes an active role in negatively impacting your career. He may give you work that is significantly below your capabilities, highlight a weakness of yours in a public meeting, assign projects to you that are set up for failure, or prevent you from leadership opportunities. A Sabotager usually comes from a place of inadequacy and believes that other people's success can limit his own.

How to Handle the Sabotager?

You can attempt to address a Sabotager directly, but he will often deny his actions and claim you are not competent. As with any request of your supervisor, state what you observed and request what you need from him in a non-defensive manner.

If you choose to communicate directly with a Sabotager, be sure to have other allies within your organization and document the issues and challenges you've faced previously.

If the Sabotager is preventing you from doing your job, you'll want to make a case to the appropriate advocate within your organization. That may be your boss's boss, a leader within the company or a Human Resources Professional. Make sure it's someone you can speak with confidentially. If there is no appropriate recourse (a complete change in your boss's perspective or a reassignment to another supervisor) you may want to consider looking elsewhere for employment.

Other Bad Bosses

Unfortunately, these are only a few types of dysfunctional bosses. You may have encountered The Abusive, The Buddy, The Obsessive, The Workaholic or The Absent. Whatever challenges your supervisor may cause you, you don't have to be at his/her mercy. You have both internal and external resources:

- Communicate your concern directly to your boss and ask specifically for what you need from him/her.
- Partner with your boss to create a win-win-win. Acknowledge your concern and engage your boss in mutual solution finding.
- Trust your intuition. If something feels out of your comfort zone, get other professionals involved.
- Document your situation. Keep track of what you believe to be inappropriate behavior.
- Look for employment elsewhere. Work should be a place where you can excel professionally and feel comfortable personally.

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