

# Eight Sticky Work Situations and How to Handle Them

By Meg Donohue, CareerBuilder.com writer

Ever suspect your boss was put on this earth just to make your job harder? If so, you're not alone.

As employees struggle to deal with managers whose behaviors range from inflexible to inappropriate, "boss" has become the workplace equivalent of a four-letter word.

So what's the best way to extricate yourself from the countless sticky situations your boss puts you in? Gini Graham Scott, Ph.D. and author of "A Survival Guide for Working with Bad Bosses: Dealing with Bullies, Idiots, Back-Stabbers, and Other Managers from Hell," touts communication and documentation as the best tools in dealing with a difficult boss.

Discussing your concerns openly is often the quickest and least painful route to resolving workplace issues. If a candid conversation does nothing to alleviate matters, it's a smart idea to document the incidents that are causing tension between you and your boss; those written statements might prove handy if the situation escalates and you opt to state your case to senior management.

The following should help you defuse some classic boss bombs:

**Sticky Situation No. 1:** You are not a personal assistant, but your boss continually asks you to pick up her dry cleaning.

**How to Deal:** "You might want to discuss the situation in a diplomatic way," Scott says, "and let your boss know that there is priority work you're not able to do while you're picking up her dry cleaning." Expressing your desire to become more involved with important, work-related projects should gently remind your boss that you were not hired to organize her personal life.

Of course, if your boss' demands are an indication of a deep-seated and unalterable power struggle à la "The Devil Wears Prada," you'll need to decide if you're willing to accept that her requests are part and parcel of your workload -- whether in the job description or not.

**Sticky Situation No. 2:** Your boss frequently loses his temper and yells at you in front of your co-workers.

**How to Deal:** Again, Scott recommends that you discuss your boss' behavior openly with him. Allowing your emotions to surface will only intensify matters, so it's best to enter this conversation calm and collected. Ask your boss if he can identify examples of things you do that trigger his temper, she suggests. "So you can determine whether you're making mistakes or if your boss is yelling at you for no reason."

"Often when a boss is... abusive, you'll find a code of silence and submission that helps everyone get along," Scott writes in her book. If a discussion with your boss does not lead to change, you'll need to decide if you want to join your co-workers' code of silence or voice your concerns to a supervisor.

**Sticky Situation No. 3:** You do both your job and your boss' job while your boss kicks back in her office and makes personal calls. When the time comes to present projects to senior management, your boss takes credit for your hard work.

**How to Deal:** Scott suggests a couple of ways to get credit even if your boss refuses to publicly acknowledge your contributions. One way to raise awareness of your work is to casually mention your involvement during meetings with senior management. You might also consider keeping management informed of the work you've done by copying them on memos over the course of a project.

**Sticky Situation No. 4:** Your boss subtly hits on you, but you know he would deny his actions if you mentioned they were upsetting you.

**How to Deal:** "Clearly stating that you're in a relationship might be enough to get your boss to back down," Scott says, but if that doesn't work, try explaining to your boss that his behavior has made you uncomfortable. "In short," Scott writes in her book, "speak up to stop the behavior sooner rather than later."

There's no excuse for sexual harassment. If your boss' conduct continues, you should make a written account of each incident as it occurs, discuss the situation with your boss' supervisor, and consider making a formal complaint with the company.

**Sticky Situation No. 5:** Your human resources department encourages employees to use their vacation time, but your boss grumbles angrily every time you ask to take time off from work.

**How to Deal:** "Bring this out in the open to clarify what the policies are," Scott says. A frank conversation with your boss might reveal that she feels your vacation requests coincide with the company's busiest and most demanding periods. "Negotiate time off for when you're not needed," she recommends.

**Sticky Situation No. 6:** You receive your annual bonus and are distressed to find it's significantly lower than your boss has verbally promised.

**How to Deal:** There might have been a misunderstanding, and Scott again suggests discussing the matter with your boss before jumping to any conclusions. If your boss can provide a reasonable answer -- perhaps the company is going through difficult times and bonuses are lower than expected across the board -- it might be best to overlook the discrepancy. But if you still feel you are owed a larger bonus, you will need to decide whether it's worth rocking the boat before going above your boss' head to resolve the matter.

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**Sticky Situation No. 7:** Your boss makes you uncomfortable by continually soliciting your advice regarding his personal problems.

**How to Deal:** "This is about setting boundaries," Scott states. Look first at your own actions to make sure you haven't unwittingly implied to your boss that you're an available confidante. If your behavior isn't what needs altering, Scott recommends you draw a boundary by suggesting a more appropriate person for your boss to take his problems to such as a family member or friend.

**Sticky Situation No. 8:** You suspect your boss of unethical and potentially illegal business practices.

**How to Deal:** This is one situation where you probably don't want to confront your boss directly, Scott advises. Document any evidence you find before informing the company of your boss' actions. "If you think your boss is committing crimes, it can be a crime to keep working there or to fail to report what you suspect to the authorities," Scott writes in her book.

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