

ASSESSMENT

How Well Do You Handle Difficult Bosses? - Results

G+1

Here's how you scored overall compared with others on hbr.org. One point was awarded for each politically savvy response.



And here's how you responded to each scenario, along with expert advice on how to handle the situation:

1. When your boss holds you back, you:

- Look for a new job so you can work with a supportive manager who will allow you to grow, because someone who doesn't give credit where it's due isn't likely to change his behavior.
- Look for common ground personally so you can connect better professionally and find out if there are reasonable explanations for what you perceive as credit stealing.
- Maintain a purely "transactional" relationship with your boss—he might take advantage of your friendship if you try to forge a more personal bond.

How HBR.org respondents answered:



The politically savvy response is: *Look for common ground*

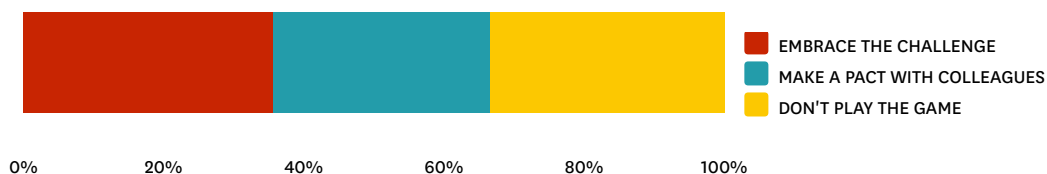
You may fantasize about changing jobs, but you probably won't have to resort to that. Jessica Pryce-Jones, CEO of the UK-based leadership consultancy iOpener and author of *Happiness at Work*, says people are often too quick to dub a work relationship a failure before taking their share of responsibility for fixing it. How can you do your part? Remember that your boss wants to succeed in his job as much as you do in yours. That will help you adopt a constructive mind-set so that you can move beyond frustration and improve the dynamic.

If you have only “transactional” conversations, Pryce-Jones says, you're unlikely to warm to each other. Look for personal similarities to make it easier for you to connect professionally. Did you grow up in the same area? Do you admire the same people? Finding common ground will help you interpret events and interactions more positively. Are there reasonable explanations for what you perceive as negative signals? Maybe your boss appears to be shutting you out of critical meetings with his boss, for instance—but it's really because one-on-ones feel more efficient to him, not because he wants to keep you from growing and advancing.

2. When your boss pits you against your colleagues, you:

- Embrace the challenge, because competitive energy brings out the best in every team member.
- Make a pact with your colleagues to work together to level the field, and directly confront anyone who is playing dirty.
- Let your boss know you're not going to play the game—she'll respect you for taking the high road.

How HBR.org respondents answered:



The politically savvy response is: *Make a pact with colleagues*

Managers often task several people with solving a business challenge and make it an implicit horse race. But instead of promoting healthy competition, this creates a frustrating environment for both you and your peers—and it can actually harm performance. When

environment for both you and your peers—and it can actually harm performance. When people focus intensely on beating one another out, they inevitably lose sight of larger goals and the greater good.

You and your colleagues can find your own ways of working together that don't ratchet up the competition. Leadership consultant Kathryn Heath figured this out early in her career, when an indifferent boss unwittingly set up a rivalry between Heath and a coworker. Heath recalls, "Our boss didn't make roles and decision rights clear for us, so we had to sort them out ourselves." The colleague wanted to take the lead, just tapping Heath for whatever support he needed. But Heath didn't intend to play a supporting role. In fact, her colleague relied on resources she controlled.

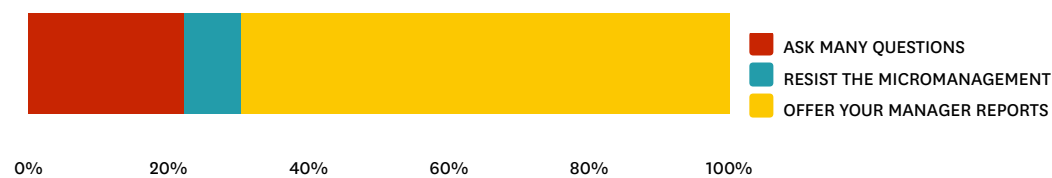
Heath decided to have a straightforward discussion with him about how they could work together on a level field. "We came up with a detailed plan for how we'd handle certain situations," she says. "And we agreed to not make any big commitments or moves without talking to each other first." It wasn't a perfect solution, but by dealing with the issue directly, they diffused what could have been an incendiary relationship.

What if your colleague is playing dirty—by one-upping you in meetings, for example, or leaving you out of the loop so that you'll look clueless? Describe exactly what you see him doing, and ask him to stop. You may not feel comfortable confronting him, but work up the courage to do it. He'll be more likely to play fair in the future because he probably doesn't enjoy confrontation any more than you do.

3. When your boss is a micromanager, you:

- Ask your manager so many questions that all the micromanagement starts to feel oppressive to him—and he backs off.
- Resist the micromanagement in whatever ways you can, until your boss recognizes your competence and loosens his grip.
- Offer your manager frequent reports on your progress—before he can even think to check up on you.

How HBR.org respondents answered:



The politically savvy response is: *Offer your manager reports*

If you openly rebel against micromanagement, your boss may clamp down even more.

Instead of viewing it as a blow to your ego, leadership consultant Ron Ashkenas advises, think about how you might actually benefit from it. Perhaps your boss wants to ensure that you have a sound understanding of the company’s protocol or the most effective ways to work the system to get things done. Regardless of the cause, says Ashkenas, accept that your boss may have something important to teach you.

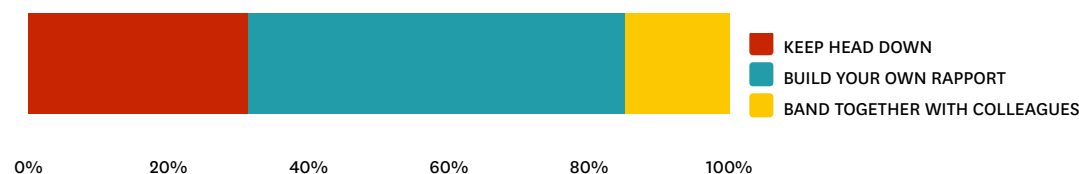
It can be hard to see things that way when your boss isn’t cutting you any slack. His harping about every small misstep you take can feel overwhelmingly personal. But you don’t have to resign yourself to being nitpicked to death.

Stewart Tubbs, former dean of the College of Business at Eastern Michigan University, suggests turning the behavior around by preempting it: Tell your boss you want him to feel he can count on you and your work. Frequently report to him on your progress—before he can even think to check up on you. And use language that signals active listening. Tubbs recalls one young man who said “Consider it done” at the end of every meeting with his boss. Another young woman said “Understood” to show that she was engaged and on board. This isn’t about simply placating your boss. You have to earn his trust by performing well. These employees consistently delivered, so over time their verbal reassurance meant something and helped their bosses relax.

4. When your boss has a pet who receives special treatment, you:

- Just keep your head down and do your best work, because sooner or later your boss will see how much more you bring to the table than her pet does.
- Build your own rapport with your boss.
- Band together with your other colleagues and approach your boss to explain how much her behavior is hurting morale.

How HBR.org respondents answered:



The politically savvy response is: *Build your own rapport*

Build your own positive relationship with your boss instead of looking for ways to dethrone the pet. That’s how you’ll get the resources and attention you want without picking—and losing—a fight.

There’s little point to moaning that your boss has a favorite and it’s not fair. That’s not going to change the situation. In fact, it could make things worse. “You’ll just look like you’re

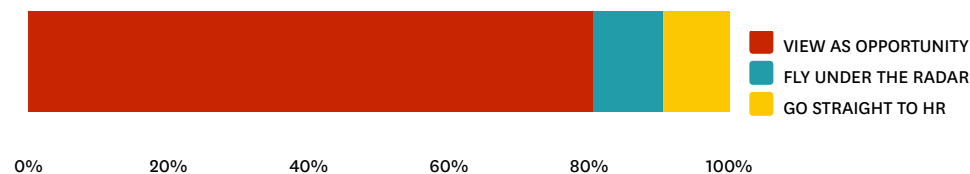
to change the situation. In fact, it could make things worse. “You it just look like you’re whining,” says leadership consultant Jill Flynn. Both your boss and your colleagues may see it as evidence that you have trouble getting along with others. Your boss may not want to assign you to projects with her pet for fear that you won’t play nicely. And the pet might pick up your negative vibe and steer clear of you—effectively making you a pariah.

Instead, get to know your boss. It’s not sucking up to ask how her weekend went or to compare notes on restaurants you’d like to try. Ask about the article she’s writing. Invite her to coffee or lunch, without an agenda. Managers enjoy sharing stories about their families and vacations as much as anyone else. So cut your boss some slack and reach out to her—not in an effort to replace her pet, but to create goodwill.

5. When dealing with a boss who has "checked out," you:

- View his lack of engagement as an opportunity for you to grow, and volunteer to take on tasks he doesn’t enjoy.
- Fly under the radar right along with him to avoid bringing him attention that he doesn’t want.
- Go straight to your colleagues in HR — they need to know how bad your manager is.

How HBR.org respondents answered:



The politically savvy response is: *View as opportunity*

When your boss lacks drive and commitment, it can be hard to see the upside. But you may actually benefit from his disinterest. It gives you a chance to fill the void with your own good work. If he doesn’t seem to care about much of anything, then he’s not likely to mind if you find ways to step in and raise your own profile, as long as your efforts don’t make more work for him.

Volunteer to take on tasks your disengaged boss doesn’t enjoy, suggests Stewart Tubbs, former dean of the College of Business at Eastern Michigan University. You don’t want him to take offense or resent your ambition and energy—so how do you gently encourage him to delegate to you? Ask if you can do anything to lighten his workload, even on a trial basis. Say you’re eager to learn new skills. Frame it as a win-win—you want to help him out and grow in the process. Most bosses would welcome the opportunity to delegate to a willing taker, says Tubbs, especially if you promise to send completed projects or reports to him first so that he can decide with whom and how to share them.