



Career Advice

Managing Your Manager: 5 Tips for Dealing with a Difficult Boss

📅 1 September 2016 👤 Tom Ireland

In life, there are good bosses and there are bad bosses. If you are very lucky, you'll only ever have to deal with the good ones, but the far greater likelihood is that you'll have to deal with a difficult boss at least once during your career. That's a tough situation to be in. Thankfully, there are some strategies you can use to downgrade it from impossible to manageable.

This is often referred to as "managing up" because you are in the position of having to manage your manager. It's not something you should have to do, but if you do, you need to be good at it. Working with a difficult boss is a very delicate situation. They (unfortunately) have all the power, so you need to be able to handle the situation without angering them.

Focus on your responsibilities

This is the most important thing of all. When you are working with a difficult boss, it is demotivating, and it can be tempting to slow down or get sloppy with your own work. Don't. That puts you just as much in the wrong as your boss. In many cases, you will have goals or targets to reach, but if you don't, set them for yourself as a way to keep your performance on track.

Get it in writing

When your bad boss wants something from you, try to get it in writing and respond in kind. This means you can document both your actions and theirs, if it becomes necessary. Even if there are spoken conversations, you can always send your boss a follow-up email that outlines what the two of you discussed.

Focus on the things that your boss is picky about

Hopefully, you don't have a boss that is impossible to deal with on every topic. In most cases, there are one or two things a boss is a stickler for. Identify your boss' pet peeves and work to make sure they don't get wound up. If it's timekeeping, for example, make sure you are always on time for work and for meetings.

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As with the previous tip, this is about accommodating your boss. You might be loath to do it, but it is worth it. Figure out your boss' working style and try to work in a similar way. Your boss will appreciate it, consciously or subconsciously doesn't matter. If they like to move quickly and get things done, or if they prefer to consider all angles before starting a project, factor that into your own work. Another example might be that they like a meeting to result in a list of actions to be taken. If that were the case, you could offer a list of action points towards the end of every meeting.

Anticipate your boss' needs

If you have a boss that is micromanaging you, try to think ahead and get things done before your boss can even ask for them. For example, if their pet peeve is finding the printer empty of paper, make it your job to keep an eye on the paper levels and add some more if it starts to get low. If you do this often enough, your boss will realise they don't need to be on your back about every little thing.

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