

Top complaints employees have about their bosses (and how to fix them)

A new LinkedIn survey reveals what managers can do better.



If you're hovering a little too closely over how your employees are performing, you're probably under extra pressure yourself to perform well. Sitthiphong / Getty Images/iStockphoto

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By Nicole Spector

You'd be hard-pressed to meet a person who has never had a [complaint about their boss](#) (current or former). In generations past, employees were taught to just suck it up and deal. You don't argue with the boss, you appease him. You don't tell her she's being unclear in an assignment, you try and clarify for yourself because you don't want her to doubt your ability to execute.

It's a pretty lopsided system, and one that has put the onus to change on the employee. Fortunately, the tide is turning as [millennials jump ship from companies](#) (and managers) that are not treating them well.

"That old-school system where the boss sits in an ivory tower and passed judgment on people or treat them like commodities is gone," says [Phyllis Horner](#), PhD, founder, Thriving Work Life Design and author of "Powerful Choices for Mid-Career Women: How to Create Your Personal Pathway to Meaning, Prosperity and Your Next Great Job." "Older generations are looking to the millennial mindset and realizing that they're right: we shouldn't have just stick it out and wait for things to get better. It's not good for a person of any age."

So bosses, it's now on you to own up to your aggravating behaviors and make real changes in your [leadership tactics](#) if you want to succeed.

LinkedIn finds that unclear expectations, micromanaging top the list of complaints

Bosses should take heed of a new [LinkedIn Learning Survey](#) revealing employees' top complaints about their bosses. According to the near 3,000 polled, these are the most frustrating behaviors of managers that may lead to one quitting a job:

- Having expectations that aren't clear or frequently change
- Micromanaging
- They are unavailable or

- Not fostering professional development.

If you're a boss displaying any of these behaviors, how can you change your ways? Bosses and leadership experts weigh in with their best tips for improvement.

Encourage questions and be honest about what you don't know

"When a good boss sets unclear expectations, it's often because what has been handed down to them, as an employee too, is vague, but they are required to pass it down, so they do," says Horner.

Bosses can be reluctant to admit their own lack of omniscience around a newly commissioned task, which can result in them expecting those under them to figure it out. Instead, they should be transparent and encourage questions that they can get answered, even if it means going back to their own boss or board.

"Say to your employees, 'Do you have any questions that would help us be successful with this?' I will then go back and find out the answers," Horner says. "Then follow up and get back to your team. Leveling it that way makes people feel empowered and enabled because you're willing to be the go-between. Also, be sure to give credit by saying things like, 'that's a great question'."

This approach may be helpful even if you do have a solid idea of the task at hand.



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Implement 'listening checks' in meeting

A practical tool to use when communicating expectations is to give 'listening checks,' says [Vanessa Ridley-Gray](#), VP, product operations at ZeroCater.

"I have learned that bosses and employees can both listen more effectively and seek clarity to ensure they are on the same page," says Ridley-Gray. "When I am in a meeting, I say, 'Can I do a listening check?' I then repeat what I thought I heard and ask for confirmation. I encourage my team to do the same. This ensures we are clear [and] accountable to each other."

Micromanaging? Check your own stress and have an open conversation about goals

If you're hovering a little too closely over how your employees are performing, you're probably under extra pressure yourself to perform well.

"I teach that, even in a crisis, when the pressure is on you as the boss and it's tricky to know how to respond to it because you feel out of control, how do you handle stress yourself without dropping it on employees? It's usually through micromanaging," notes Horner.

You may not even realize you're micromanaging, but your employees will, and it will likely upset them. So, in addition to taking the time and care [to ease your own stress](#), make an effort to show your employees that you trust them.

“[Communicate to your employees](#) that there’s a bottom line that needs to happen, and explain to your employees the challenge and how you’re committed to their success as well as the company’s,” says Horner. “If there’s something you have to instruct them on, like if you’re bringing in a new technology, let them know you’re doing so not because you don’t trust their ability, but because we’re all learning. Have an open conversation that let’s everyone know, ‘together we will make this work.’”

Be mindful that everyone is different. Some people will pick up a new skill more quickly than others. This doesn’t mean the one that lags is less capable, nor does it mean that you have to helicopter-manage those struggling.

“You have to be able to read that someone knows how to do something, then ask then, can you teach the next person this? This is how you escape the trap of micromanaging,” says Horner.



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July 9, 2018 03:18



Even ultra busy introverts have no excuse for being absent

You may truly value your team, but perhaps because you're so absorbed in your own work, or an introvert, your employees are mistaking you for being aloof, which can be a deal breaker for them, Horner notes. Or, you're just not all that available, which is also problematic, for obvious reasons.

The answer to handling these issues is simple, but not necessarily easy. You have to get out there and be real with your team in an approachable, genuine manner.

"Ask yourself, 'who am I role-modeling after? It's your responsibility to figure this out and right the ship,'" says Horner. "I have counseled countless people to get [out of their offices and walk around](#) [the workspace]."

Merely the act of showing you're part of the team can be effective in revealing that you care and respect your employees and are on the same page as the are in terms of wanting success, but also being a human being. This may be uncomfortable for you if you're naturally withdrawn, but it's necessary and will likely be appreciated.

"I can't expect anyone else to get outside [their comfort zone](#) [and innovate] if I'm not first willing to get outside my own," says [Mark Arsenault](#), executive director at Success Reentry, adding that this survey was a welcomed eye-opener for him. "It can be difficult to suppress one's ego for the sake of serving by example, but it's extremely important to do so."

Your employees need to know they can grow at your company, invest in them

Horner finds that many managers resist investing in [developing their employees](#) because there's a fear that they'll take the training, mentorship, education or whatever else they're learning to grow only to move companies a year later.

This may very well happen, but guess what? If you don't put those assets into growing your employee's marketable potential, you've already lost them.

"All the best companies today [invest in inclusion and employee development](#)," says Horner. "Those companies who don't do the investing aren't [necessarily] short-sighted, they're thinking about dollars on the table. They're thinking that millennials won't stay and they've just essentially given that [development] money to another company. But this is not just a financial relationship, it's a human one."

Not investing in your workers' development will only cause them to seek out better opportunities, says Horner, and it could come back to hurt you later when you're looking to hire and word has spread on sites like Glassdoor that you don't value your talent enough to help them grow.

Ideally, tackling your behavioral blind spots will help you focus more on these proactive measures, which can have a positive ripple effect throughout your team and company.

"My weakness in communication flexibility made me realize that I needed to enable one of my team members, who is a far better communicator than me, to be the leader in our company from a daily-direction standpoint," says [Josh Rubin](#), CEO of Post Modern Marketing. "Bringing her up to be a leader has already started paying off with our team, their attitude and [productivity](#)."

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