

How to handle your difficult boss

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People don't leave companies, they leave managers. Or so the saying goes. While there's little to love about a mean boss, sometimes such managers are the unfortunate side effect of your dream job or that awesome company you've always wanted to work for.



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If you love what you do, don't ditch your job just because of your boss. Rather, try a little self-leadership, where you proactively look for ways to play to your manager's likes, strengths, behaviours and attitudes and work with them as opposed to against them. This approach empowers you to take responsibility for your own professional success.

To do this, it's important first to understand the management context. For a start, bosses are tough, but that's why they're in the leadership position. To become a successful manager in today's competitive climate, managers need to be highly efficient, quality focused and deadline driven. And they will expect the same from their staff. Naturally, this strict command can at times seem unfair or even uncaring.

Next, bosses are more direct; their role demands it of them. Think about it, every time your boss upsets you, you tell someone. You bemoan the fact to a friend, a colleague or your spouse, but never your boss. On the opposite end of the scale, leaders are more direct with their thoughts or feelings regarding your behaviour.

It's often this inherent strictness and perceived shift in the balance of power - and not the manager's performance, productivity or even qualifications - that prompt staff to label their managers horrible bosses.

Three career-saving tips

If you count yourself among these employees, here are three career-saving tips to remember when dealing with your boss:

1. Ask yourself why. Whatever the situation, ask yourself in that moment why you are so upset with your boss. Is it what he has asked you to do, or the way in which he asked you to do it? Guard against judging your boss simply by his attitude. If his demands are reasonable and work related, rise above any emotional attachment you feel to what is being asked of you. To help you achieve this, put yourself in your manager's shoes for a second and don't take it personally. Having said that, never tolerate a boss who is offensive or abusive.

2. Don't diss your boss. Don't show your disapproval of your manager's attitude with a bad attitude of your own, and especially not in front of others. Your manager needs to be assured of your co-operation, the absence of which can be construed as disrespect - an extremely negative trait that will mar the rest of your time in that position and could compromise your future success in the company. Rather, sit down with your manager and explain your difficulty in understanding his attitude towards you.
3. Take it further. If you truly feel your manager's requests aren't reasonable, and your negotiations for improved treatment have proved fruitless, gather evidence of this and take it up with your manager's superior or your HR manager. Aim for written evidence (emails, SMSes or social media messages).

Managers have a job to do, and it's up to us as their staff to help them do it in the best way possible. You will encounter many different, and sometimes difficult, personalities during your working career; the sooner you learn to deal with them successfully, the greater the chance of your own eventual management success.

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