

How to Deal with a Difficult Boss: Solutions to 7 Types of Bad Management Styles

By Lyndsay Swinton

Work sucks when you don't know how to deal with a difficult boss. It's often said, people don't quit a job, they quit a boss. Here to help you recognise and deal with a difficult boss, are solutions to 7 different types of management style.

It takes two to tango...

Maybe you're the boss, and have a difficult employee. Any chance they think you're behaving badly? You might be as nice as cherry pie, but if you've been cast as the wicked witch, you're going to clash and clash and clash some more until you get a little mutual understanding going on.

It is possible to be a great person and a bad boss. The key to a successful working relationship, is to separate the behaviour from the person. Is the bad behaviour temporary due to over-work or personal stress, or due to something as simple as lack of management skills. Being sensitive to the underlying reasons means your boss can save face and improve their behaviour appropriately.

Here are 7 of the usual bad management suspects.....

The Bland Boss

A bland boss is as much use as a chocolate fireguard! They usually avoid risk or conflict at all cost, are vague and flit between decisions.

First off, you need to notice which situations trigger their bland or weak behaviour. If they regularly avoid conflict, they may need to be liked by everyone, so take someone else into combat with you or maybe get their boss to assume a greater leadership role.

If they are vague and provide little direction, it may be they're lacking management skills and don't realise that's their job. Often unskilled or inexperienced managers are uncomfortable telling someone what to do. Train your manager by being clear about the direction you need to do your job, making sure they commit it to writing, so you both know what's agreed.

The Grunt

The grunt has no original thought, drive or ambition. In fact, two short planks of wood'd make a better boss.

You've got a fantastic idea, which you've researched and know will work, and take it to your grunt boss to agree how to implement it. Bad idea. At best they'll tell you why it won't work, at worst they'll just not have the brain power to comprehend something new. The best way to manage a grunt is to let them stick to what they know, and wait patiently for the next round of down-sizing and wave them off the premises.

The Control-Freak

The controlling manager barely lets you cough in a meeting let alone say something original or creative. You're being managed at such an itty bitty level of detail you feel like a single cell specimen under a microscope. Anything that doesn't conform is changed or rejected. Eventually you suffer from learned helplessness, the inability to think or function for yourself.

What's driving this behaviour? Usually it's anxiety about failing or making mistakes, and micro-managing tasks gives them a reassuring feeling that the correct steps are being taken. Provide that reassurance by detailing the steps you've taken, who've you've spoken to and how you've assessed and addressed any risks.

The Politician

The political manager is a self-interested self-promoter, and generates more spin than a flywheel. You can trust them about as far as you can throw them.

Politicians are often easy to upwardly manage. Get their support by emphasising how good they'll look to their seniors, Avoid being a potential scapegoat, by getting public written support for anything risky or controversial. Politicians often play favourites, so enjoy it while it lasts, and don't take it personally when you're dropped.

The Absent Manager

When your main conversation with your boss is a hurried chat masquerading as an annual appraisal, you could say you've got an absent manager. No manager may be better than an absent manager.

The absent manager goes missing in action, traveling across the globe, or is just plain busy. The secret is getting on their radar by getting in their diary. Establish a routine for communication, and stick to it. Maximise face time, by preparing thoroughly beforehand. Think and talk in headlines, summing up what decisions they need to make, or direction they need to give and get out. It might take more effort on your part, but your manager will respect you for it.

The Whip-Cracker

The whip-cracker knows when you're goofing off. The whip-cracker knows when you're just thinking about goofing off. The whip-cracker doesn't sleep, drink or pee. Or have a life.

And they don't expect you to have a life either. Or be human.

It's useful to take a long term view with a whip-cracker. Is there some major deadline looming that explains the behaviour? Or does lightening up scare them to death? Decide how many extra miles you are prepared to go, and how often, and live with it.

The Spiteful Manager

In its extreme mutation, the spiteful manager is a bully. The bully's raison d'être is to belittle people for pleasure. A bully is the nasty and ruthless wicked witch (or wizard!)

Have a look around – is your manager singling you out or are there other victims? If you're the unlucky one, maybe your styles clash – you're need for detailed direction is perceived as clingy neediness – so consider changing your approach. Or it may be that the manager just doesn't get the subtleties of interpersonal communication and has a miniscule emotional IQ. Then at least you know it's not personal!

Take a look at this [bullying article](#) and find out how to beat the bully.

Regardless of which type of management style your boss has, the best way to change their behaviour is to talk to them. [Giving effective feedback](#) at least makes them aware of their behaviour, its impact on you, and more importantly how you would prefer them to behave. With time and luck, the boss's behaviour will improve, but if not, you've got two choices. Maybe everything else in your work and life is good enough for you to grin and bear it or do what many people do - quit your boss and move on.

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