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10 kinds of bad bosses and how to survive them



Photo: Sanja Gjenero

Bad bosses are bad for business and they can make everyone's workday miserable. But not all bad bosses are created equal, according to authors [Kathi Elster](#) and [Katherine Crowley](#). In *[Working for You Isn't Working for Me: The Ultimate Guide to Managing Your Boss](#)*, they describe the kinds of bad bosses that may be infecting your office and how to handle them. Here are ten of the offenders you should look out for in your workplace and tips on how to survive working for them.

1. The Chronic Critic. This kind of boss doesn't think you can do anything right—and is very vocal about it. And the criticism is not limited to your job performance either. Your clothes, your personal life, or the car you drive are all fair game for this boss to dissect. When you start working for the chronic critic, you may have a brief honeymoon period, but then this kind of boss will completely obliterate your confidence.

"Usually you have two good weeks with The Chronic Critic and then it starts to get ugly," said Elster. "You'll feel like nothing you do is good enough because they'll always find fault with everything you do."

How to survive The Chronic Critic: First and foremost, take good care of yourself. Keep in mind that this is someone who is never going to be happy with anything that you do. It's nothing personal because The Chronic Critic is doing this to your colleagues as well. If you need a self-esteem boost, make a list of your accomplishments every day so that you can pat yourself on the back regularly.

2. The Calculating Confidante. These bosses will make you feel like they really care about you by always asking you questions about what's going on in your life. Don't fall for this—it's a trap. They don't care about you; they care about information about you.

"What this person is trying to do is find out intimate details about your life that then they can turn around and use against you," Elster said. "They dig and dig and they'll use their pop psychology to draw you in and make you feel as if they care about you—but actually they're looking for material to hang you on."

How to survive The Calculating Confidante: Simply put—keep a lid on it. Don't accept invitations to social events with this boss. Avoid long lunches. And most importantly, keep your mouth shut.

"If your boss starts telling you private information about someone else, acting as if they're saying it as a compassionate counselor, you need to become sealed like a trap," said Crowley. "They are not that competent at doing the actual activities of their job and so what they're counting on is political maneuvering. Through having the goods on others, they will remain untouched."

3. The Love-Struck Boss. Although the behavior of these bosses may not rise to the level of sexual harassment, they are looking for love in all the wrong places—namely, your cubicle. This boss will ask you to stay late on special projects, compliment you on what you're wearing, or gaze a little bit too long at you during meetings. The Love-Struck Boss also has no boundaries and is emotionally needy.

How to survive The Love-Struck Boss: Although you may feel flattered by attention from The Love-Struck Boss, or even reciprocate those romantic feelings, keep things professional between the two of you. The less you make yourself available to The Love-Struck Boss outside of working hours, the more likely this boss will look for love in someone else's cubicle.

4. The Rule Changer Boss. The Rule Changer Boss will tell you to do one thing on Monday morning and something completely different by Monday afternoon. You may start to wonder if The Rule Changer Boss has

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problems with short-term memory because directives will change so frequently.

How to survive The Rule Changer Boss: "The only way to handle The Rule Changer is to use pencil, not pen," said Elster.

When working for The Rule Changer Boss, you need to check in frequently to make sure you are on the right track before you get completely contradictory instructions.

5. The Persecutor Boss. For The Persecutor Boss, making you feel like dirt is a daily priority. This boss is cruel, critical, and thinks you are nothing more than an incompetent turd—and lets you know it all the time. Usually this boss will have a rotation of abuse, so that everyone gets to spend time squirming in the hot seat.

"They know they're doing something a little naughty and they really can't help themselves. They target an individual and there's really no reason. They just decide to target somebody and abuse them—and they do it publicly," said Crowley. "They don't understand the magnitude of their behavior and as a result, The Persecutor Bosses have 100 percent turnover a year. In most cases, people don't even make it a year with The Persecutor Boss."

How to survive The Persecutor Boss: "If you're being persecuted, what we suggest is that you really take care of yourself in terms of making sure that you're getting sleep, exercising, and eating healthy because it will just wreak havoc on you," Elster added. "The only way you can deal with it is if you can really see that it's not your problem, it's theirs—and that's not easy."

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6. The Grandiose Boss. Grandiose Bosses think they are the best thing in the office since sliced bread and have no trouble letting everyone know it.

"The Grandiose Boss is really full of himself. He's the person that's just better than everyone, and will rehash and tell you stories from 20 years ago," said Elster. "They're really quite annoying to everybody else. They're very stuck in the past and you have to put up with lots of hours of listening."

How to survive The Grandiose Boss: Put on your listening ears because if you stay with this boss, you're going to need them. If you humor Grandiose Bosses and listen to their numerous success stories, they will eventually let you get some work done. And don't forget to throw in some gratuitous compliments to stroke their overdeveloped egos.

7. The Underminer Boss. "This is the person that makes it impossible to actually do your job," said Crowley. "They give you work, but then they may not give you the support that you need to get the job done. Or they may give you a job to do and turn around and give somebody else the same job."

How to survive The Underminer Boss: Let Underminer Bosses know that if they give you responsibility, they should also give you the authority that goes with it—otherwise the job will not get done. Also, check around with your coworkers to ensure that more than one person has not been given the same tasks.

8. The Sacred Cow Boss. Some incarnation of The Sacred Cow Boss can be found in every workplace and in some cases, people can't figure out exactly what it is this boss does all day—or why this person became the boss in the first place.

"The Sacred Cow Boss has been at a company for a long time and it's not really clear why," said Elster. "They're not particularly skilled or gifted and they've risen to a certain level of incompetence, but there's a loyalty they have with either the business owner or the chief executive that makes them impermeable—you just cannot get them out of their position."

These bosses can be difficult to work for because their desire to fly under the radar can stifle the creativity of a department. The Sacred Cow Boss does not want to take risks and will not let employees try anything new.

How to survive The Sacred Cow Boss: You have to bow down at the altar of Sacred Cow Bosses because you are never going to win if you go against them. If you make them look good, however, they may begin to trust you and start giving you more freedom to pursue your ideas.

9. The Spineless Boss. Spineless Bosses want to be loved by everyone and they are ineffectual because they can't take a stand on anything. Conflict scares them, so when there is a problem in the department, you can expect them to be affable—and not much else.

How to survive The Spineless Boss: "You have to work around them," said Crowley. "You have to find out who else in the company can help you and how you can get things done around your boss."

10. The Former Colleague Boss. Whether or not Former Colleague Bosses are bad depends on how they handle being in a position of power. Climbing up the corporate ladder can change some people, so if a friend becomes your boss suddenly, don't be surprised if the relationship completely changes.

How to survive The Former Colleague Boss: Don't expect special treatment because your friend is now your boss. And in some cases, you should be prepared for the possibility that the friendship may be lost entirely after the promotion.

This article originally appeared on my [Workplace Communication Examiner](#) page on September 30, 2009.