

# Introduction

Virtually everyone has had some bad bosses over the course of their career, from the first job during or after high school to the present. In some cases, these bosses are aware they are “bad.” In other cases, bosses may think they are great and don’t have a clue what others think of them. You have hard-driving tyrants who measure success on the employee’s productivity and don’t give a fig if employees like them or are happy; for them the bottom line is all that matters. At the other extreme, bosses can be bad because they are so concerned with being liked, with being one of the gang, that they have problems with authority and control. When they spend all that time schmoozing with their employees, little gets done. They may be well-liked as a sympathetic, understanding friend, but that alone doesn’t make a good boss.

So what is a “bad” boss? Essentially, any boss who is difficult and hard to deal with or who has trouble directing and guiding employees to effectively do the work can qualify as a bad boss. For example, such a boss might be incompetent, give unclear instructions, blame others, take undue credit, be high-strung and hyper, be disorganized, act like a power mad tyrant, or any combination of such characteristics. And in today’s highly competitive, high-stress environment where a growing number of jobs are being outsourced and loyalty to a particular job or company is a thing of the past, the

pressure and stresses that contribute to bad “bosshood” and difficult employer–employee relationships are more difficult than ever.

While the assessment of “badness” can be made more objectively by the boss’s own boss, for employees, the subjective measure—what they think of the boss—is what counts. It’s this latter approach we will take in this book, looking at what makes someone a bad boss and analyzing what can be done about it.

*A Survival Guide to Working with Bad Bosses* draws on real-life stories I have learned of in the course of consulting, conducting workshops and seminars, writing columns and books, and just talking to people about their experiences in the workplace. Each chapter uses a mix of problem-solving and conflict-resolution techniques, along with methods such as visualization, analytical reasoning, and intuitive assessment. In the end, the most important tool you have at your disposal is your common sense. You’ll find that being straightforward and open where you can be, and otherwise playing your cards strategically and close to the vest, will produce the best results.

Since your livelihood depends in large part upon your relationship with your boss, you may find there are times when it’s best to follow instructions and back off from stating exactly what you think. But on other occasions, you may do better to stand up for what you believe, even if it means possibly losing your job. An example might be if a bad boss asks you to do something illegal or unethical. Or perhaps a stealthier approach might be in order; there may be a way to expose your bad boss without getting stomped on yourself.

The best approach to use in a particular situation depends very much upon the circumstances. The ideal is to find a balanced solution that will allow for the greatest chance for success. You need to figure out when to follow the rules and when to bend or break them; when to be forceful and aggressive and when to back down; and when to act on your own and when to seek out alliances with other employees to negotiate with your boss together for the most satisfying solution.

However, while seeking that balance, it’s important to recognize that no one approach or solution fits all. You have to adapt them not only to the situation, but also to your own style and personality, as well as that of your boss. And you have to consider if this is a problem that affects others or many others in the office or if it primarily affects you, which may make the difference in whether to seek a

group or individual solution. Also, different principles, strategies, and tactics will work best for you at different times based on what's going on at the company, or even how your boss is feeling on a particular day.

Consider these chapters to be a series of recipes for better ways to deal with a buffet or smorgasbord of bad bosses. In keeping with this recipe approach, each chapter features the following ingredients:

- An introductory paragraph highlighting the problem.
- A short story or two about one or more people who faced this type of boss (with their identities, companies, and bosses concealed).
- A quiz with a list of possible responses, so you can think about what you might do in a given situation. You can even use this as a game to discuss this issue with others and compare your responses.
- A discussion of how these employees chose to respond to their bad boss or how they might respond.
- A series of three or more take-aways to highlight the chapter's key points.

As you read about how other people have dealt with bad bosses, you might think about how you can apply these strategies yourself or use them to advise a friend or colleague with a bad boss.

I hope you enjoy this survival guide, and I hope it helps you to improve your situation at work. Read on and meet the many different breeds of bad bosses, those varied species of wildlife in the office zoo. Feel free to explore and visit these different boss species in any order, and as you do, think about what you can learn about how to deal with your boss. Think of yourself as a kind of "boss keeper": The more skilled you are, the higher your "boss keeper" score (your BKS for short), and the more tractable, pleasant, and helpful your boss will be.

If you have your own questions, feel free to visit my website at [www.badbosses.net](http://www.badbosses.net) and send them to me.

