

THE GLOBE AND MAIL



How to tell if your boss is 'horrible'

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Somehow Darth Vader puts everything else into perspective.

Bad bosses make big box office. Think Meryl Streep's character in *The Devil Wears Prada*; Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*, and the darkest of all workplace bullies: Darth Vader in *Star Wars*.

This weekend brings a new batch of terrible supervisors: the comedy movie *Horrible Bosses* features three managers who are turning workdays into such nightmares that employees start plotting murder.

The victims in Hollywood's bad boss films may wish for delicious revenge, but a reality check is in order, experts caution. Reason and clear thinking can go a long way to make bosses and the working relationship better.

The reason we're so fascinated by rotten bosses shows up in the results of a couple of new surveys: A lot of us have worked for at least one - and often several - real turkeys.

Forty-six per cent of North American employees surveyed by staffing service OfficeTeam said they've worked for an unreasonable manager at some point in their career. Thirty-eight per cent quit, while 35 per cent tried to improve the situation and had some success, but 24 per cent said they just toughed it out in silence.

Meanwhile, an online survey garnered more than 20,000 responses from those who have experienced miserable managers - 88 per cent said the situation forced them to either quit or change positions. It happened twice to 22 per cent of the respondents, three times to 8 per cent, and more than three times to 14 per cent, the online survey by the Canadian website Badbossology.com found.

There are ways to salvage a working relationship that's gone bad, but it takes efforts from both employees and bosses, the pros say.

Is your boss a problem manager?

Six strategies for handling six common types of bad bosses

Here's a look at some common types of bad bosses, and tips on how to handle them, according to the advisers at OfficeTeam:

THE MICROMANAGER

This boss has trouble delegating tasks and hovers regularly to make sure you complete a project exactly as told.

How to cope: Trust is usually the issue here, so make sure you build it. Don't miss deadlines, pay attention to details and keep your supervisor apprised of all the steps you've taken to ensure quality work.

THE POOR COMMUNICATOR

This boss provides little or no direction, putting you on the spot because assignments often have to be completed at the last minute or redone because goals and deadlines weren't explained!

How to cope: At the start of a project, ask for any information your boss hasn't provided. Diplomatically point out that these details are necessary to ensure you meet expectations. Seek clarification when confused and arrange regular check-ins.



Horrible Bosses is a 2011 black comedy film directed by Seth Gordon. The plot follows three friends, played by Jason Bateman, Charlie Day, and Jonathan Sudeikis, who decide to murder their respective overbearing, abusive bosses, portrayed by Kevin Spacey, Jennifer Aniston and Colin Farrell. Of course, it's far too rude for school...

THE BULLY

It's his or her way, or no way at all. Symptoms also include gruffness and expressions of frustration about your perceived inability to do things correctly!

How to cope: Stand up for yourself. The next time your manager shoots down your proposal, calmly explain your rationale for doing things in your way. This boss will often relent when presented with a voice of reason.

THE SABOTEUR

This supervisor undermines the efforts of others and rarely recognizes individuals for a job well done. This often shows up in the boss taking credit for employees' ideas but placing blame on others when projects go awry!

How to cope: Your job is to make your boss look good, but not at the expense of your own career advancement. Ensure your contributions are more visible to others, especially senior management. Get information in writing from this person so you have a chain of communications to refer to, if needed.

THE UNPREDICTABLE

The manager whose moods swing regularly is always a surprise. He or she may confide in you one day and turn a cold shoulder the next!

How to cope: Try not to take the swings personally. Stay calm and composed when dealing with this supervisor. When he or she is on edge, try to limit communication to urgent matters.



Some bosses are scarier than others. Michael Corleone, the Godfather, would be *very* scary...

THE CLUELESS

This boss doesn't seem to know there is a problem with his or her behaviour!

How to cope: Try to talk things out privately, but make sure you emphasize the positive because the conversation might turn ugly. Share the blame, but spell out your needs and how you like to be dealt with. One way to get the attention of an oblivious manager is to demonstrate that you can accomplish more if the boss's attitude changes.

"In general, bad bosses aren't bad people," says Trent Arendse, branch manager of OfficeTeam in Burlington, Ont. "In most cases, they may not be aware of their lack of effectiveness as leaders."

That's why every supervisor should take a good look in the mirror and assess how their personality and behaviour may affect their staff and the workplace environment. Here are some tips on what to look for:

Early-warning signals

"One of the biggest indicators that you're a bad boss is the amount of turnover you have - because more than half of staff turnover happens because staff can't stand their supervisor," said Mr. Arendse.

Admit you're not perfect *"You have to be open-minded enough as a boss to see issues that can limit your effectiveness and be willing to put forth the effort to change them,"* he said.



The Boss. Musician Bruce Springsteen (1949-).

Know your staff

A key reason many workers resent their manager is that they feel their needs for recognition are not being met. Everyone has a different work style, so take time to get to know your workers and how they work.

As a supervisor, you need to be above personality issues. *"You've got to be the bigger person as a leader,"* he said. *"Even if you dislike someone as a person, you have a responsibility to work with the person as an employee who is essential for the bottom line."*

Mean what you say

People can easily tell when someone isn't being sincere. So if you don't mean what you say, don't say it, he advises. Otherwise, your employees will become defensive and tend to reject your messages.

Get formal training

At OfficeTeam, Mr. Arendse said, new managers get a month of classroom training on managing staff, and do self-assessment training. The exercises are designed to point out their potential leadership flaws so they can work on them.

What is "The Devil Wears Prada" about?

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Devil_Wears_Prada_%28film%29

Andrea "Andy" Sachs (Anne Hathaway) is an aspiring journalist fresh out of Northwestern University. Despite ridiculing the shallowness of the fashion industry, she lands the job, "a million girls would kill for": junior personal assistant to Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep), the icy editor-in-chief of *Runway* fashion magazine. Despite having little knowledge of fashion, Andy puts up with Miranda's bizarre and humiliating treatment in hopes of getting a job as a reporter or writer somewhere else. At first, Andy fumbles with her job and fits in poorly with her catty coworkers, especially Miranda's British senior assistant Emily Charlton (Emily Blunt). How far will Andy be prepared to go for the job, "a million girls would kill for"?



Promotion poster for the movie.

✓ Answer the following questions as you watch the movie:

1. Based on Andy's experience, what are some obstacles and challenges a young person will face in the workplace?

Lack of experience and respect from older coworkers.

Pressure to meet unrealistic expectations from demanding supervisors.

Balancing ambition with personal values.

Difficulty standing up for oneself in a competitive environment.

Having to adapt quickly to unfamiliar professional cultures.

2. What employability skills does Andy have?

Strong written and verbal communication.

Time management and multitasking.

Adaptability and willingness to learn.

Perseverance under pressure.

Professionalism and dedication, even when treated unfairly.

3. Using Andy as an example, how can a job interfere with your social, family, and personal life?

Andy's long hours and constant availability for her boss caused her to neglect her friends and boyfriend. She sacrificed her personal time and well-being to meet work demands.

Her career consumed her identity, creating distance from the people who cared about her.

4. Does your boss have the right to contact you whenever he or she feels necessary? Why or why not?

No, because employees deserve boundaries and personal time outside of work.

Constant contact leads to burnout and violates work-life balance.

Exceptions might exist in urgent or emergency situations, but it shouldn't be the norm.



Andy and Miranda in one of their many employee/boss interchanges during the movie.

5. Would you be willing to do personal errands for your boss to please him or her? Why?

Only if it's part of the job description or reasonable within professional limits.

Doing personal errands can blur boundaries and create unfair expectations.

It's important to maintain professionalism and self-respect.

6. What would you be willing to sacrifice to ensure that you fulfill your dreams/goals?

I'd sacrifice comfort, free time, and short-term pleasures - but not my morals, health, or relationships.

True success shouldn't come at the cost of one's integrity or happiness.

7. Would you betray your family and/or friends for a job promotion?

No, because loyalty and ethics are more valuable than any position.

Success without meaningful relationships isn't real success.

8. Would you change who you are (personality, image, attitude, etc.) in order to keep a job?

I'd adapt my professionalism and appearance to suit the workplace, but not change my core values or beliefs.

Growth is good - pretending to be someone you're not is not sustainable.

9. What life lessons did *The Devil Wears Prada* teach you?

Don't lose yourself or your values for success.

Ambition is good, but balance is essential.

Respect and boundaries are key in any workplace.

Know when to walk away from a toxic environment, even if it means giving up a "dream job."