

LifeMapSM



LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success.

Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more satisfying life.

April 2015

This Month's Message:

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Abusive Bosses.

A couple of years ago I took a first pass at this topic. Since then I have continued to get emails asking for help dealing with a "boss from hell". Thus, I am constantly on the lookout for hard data we can rely on as well as proactive responses to help you protect your health, sanity and career.

First let's define what we're talking about. An abusive boss can be inept, humiliating, untrained, hypercritical, make unwanted sexual advances, use inappropriate language, micromanage, push blame onto subordinates, treat employees unfairly, play favorites or develop a network of informers. And the list goes on and on.

The bottom line is that these behaviors exact a heavy toll on employees and are linked to high blood pressure, sleep

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problems, anxiety and is associated with other unhealthy behaviors. In a 2014 Work and Well-Being Survey of 1500 people by the American Psychological Association they found that a third said "problems with my supervisor" was a major cause of their work stress. A 2012 meta-analysis in the Journal of Applied Psychology reviewed 279 different studies and found a link between perceived unfairness at work and mental and physical health complaints.

If you find yourself working for this kind of person what can you do?

Paths Forward

* **What's the Source?** In my experience most bad bosses are not bad people. Most have either been promoted beyond their capabilities and/or have not received adequate (or even *any*) training in the management of people. Understanding this will not - in and of itself - resolve the situation or make your life immediately easier. But it will affect your attitude as you implement some of the ideas I suggest below.

* **Is Support An Option?** Is your boss under unrelenting pressure from above, floundering from inadequate resources or living with difficult personal, family, financial or health problems? This does not excuse bad behavior but it may explain it. You may make some headway by trying harder to support this person. Doing this will raise your stock as a team player. I have observed instances where this approach actually improves the boss's behavior. Not often but often enough for you to give it a try.

* **Start a Log.** Does your boss take credit for your work, scream, put you down, give conflicting direction, use insulting, demeaning, sexist, ageist, racist language? Is she a control freak, a name-caller, a gossip, or back-stabber? Is he emotionally out of control? Call the behavior by name, write down specific examples and note the date, time, place and any witnesses. Your notes should be unemotional and factual. Keep it off-site and on your (not the company's) computer. One occasion is a slip up, a second may be a rare relapse but three times means you've got a bona-fide problem and you need to take action. If you consult with a physician or therapist or some other professional to deal with symptoms related to a bad boss make sure you capture the relevant data.

* **When and How to Confront.**

- If increasing support for the boss is not an option or you have tried it and it hasn't worked it is time to directly confront the behavior. Some bad bosses back off after a direct confrontation (think back to school-yard bullies).
- If your boss is insulting, demeaning, or a screamer responding calmly with something like "I find your language (or tone or ---) unhelpful (or offensive). There's a better way to deal with this such as - - -" (and here you insert your solution).
- If your boss has been wreaking havoc with your reputation try something like "I'm disappointed to hear from others that

you're not satisfied with my work. I'd like to sit and talk with you about how to improve this."

- If your boss is a hovering, micro-manager try saying "Look, if I'm doing something wrong or not getting the results we need I certainly welcome your feedback. And maybe you don't realize your doing it but no one does their best work with someone constantly looking over their shoulder."

- Your approach should be positive, assertive, unemotional, and professional.

For more ideas along these lines try [A Survival Guide for Working With Bad Bosses: Dealing With Bullies, Idiots, Backstabbers, And Other Managers from Hell](#) by Gini Graham Scott Ph.D. or

[The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't](#) Sep 1, 2010 by Robert I. Sutton

*** Bumping It Upstairs.** If trying to fix it on your own hasn't worked it is time to elevate the issue. If your organization is one that has a zero-tolerance policy for harassment or bullying you should bring your situation to the notice of a professional human resources department or another senior manager who is motivated to review your log, hear your attempts to fix the situation and intervene on your behalf. If this level of support does not exist in your organization it is time for you to start the job changing process. Do not sign any releases without counsel and do not relinquish any of your documentation as it will be of great value to any employment attorney who can advise you as to possible actions for defamation, hostile workplace or emotional / physical distress. This route can be a taxing process and if you've gone on to a better job you might not want to bother. But stupid organizations will continue to act that way until they realize there is no profit in it.

*** Beware of the Psychopath.** If your boss has a nickname like Chainsaw Al, the Queen of Mean, or the Boss-atollah you've probably got a bigger problem than you (or me or anybody without jumper cables and the willingness to use them) can fix. The more current term "sociopath" refers to those who are callous, without conscience or empathy, deceitful, verbally and psychologically abusive, exploitive, conning and cunning, delusional and megalomaniacal. Interestingly these same people can be seen as glib, charming, charismatic, take-charge, likeable, visionary, and motivated by power and control over others. These latter traits are often sought in senior managers and CEOs. If you've ever wondered why so many supposedly intelligent executives are willing and capable of engaging in outright criminal behavior this is the answer. These traits are screened for by the FBI, many police departments, some teachers and firefighters and operators of nuclear power plants. But corporations are far more likely to look for an MBA than the existence of a conscience. If you work for a sociopath (or think there may be one among your family or friends) I have only two suggestions. The first is to confirm your opinion by reading the best book I've found on the topic:

[The Sociopath Next Door](#) Mar 14, 2006 by Martha Stout

If this accessible book confirms your personal assessment then I offer you suggestion number two: terminate the relationship by finding another boss or another job or eliminating this family member or friend from your life. You will not be able to change them - ever. Good people have a hard time believing that even a small percentage of others can be so evil and destructive but, sadly, it is true.

LifeMap (sm) is about helping you to face up to difficult situations, stand up for yourself, and demand the respect that you rightfully deserve.

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Resources

Are you or someone you know job hunting or thinking about it?

The best, concise, all-round job changing guide available. Revised Edition [Winning Job Interviews](#) by Dr. Paul Powers.

In this easy-to-follow, step-by-step book, Dr. Paul Powers demystifies job interviewing, explains why the process actually favors the job hunter, and shows how you can dramatically improve your interview skills. Packed with solid, practical information and laced with both humor and "kick in the pants" motivation, *Winning Job Interviews* is the book you wished you had before your last interview... and is mandatory preparation for your next one!

Stalled at work? Still struggling to find your true vocation?

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<http://www.drpaulpowers.com/booksandarticles.html>

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Sincerely,

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