

## ***Boss Bullies: The Chain of Pain***

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Encounters with hypercritical and aggressive bosses that are never satisfied, can make the work you could love seem unfulfilling and tedious.

Then again, maybe YOU really ARE the problem! Does your "Boss Bully" have just cause, but inappropriate methods? Or does s/he treat most everyone with contempt? Assuming the "Boss Bully" really is a bully, what can be done about it?

Often, as companies are forced to streamline, the staff gets leaner, the workloads get bigger, and bosses get meaner. Vacation and sick time, deadlines and workloads, and performance reviews seem to get more and more restrictive.

The truth is that these "Boss Bullies" often live under the gun and face similar pressures from their own bosses; they have a way of transferring their own pressure to others ... the *Chain of Pain* may help ease their burden, but it is ultimately neither good for themselves, their employees or their organization.

Here is a list of some other Boss Bullying tactics:

- Gives you their own work to do, but takes all the credit
- Gives you work that's well below or way above your potential
- Doesn't follow their own work rules (attendance, lunch breaks, deadlines, gossiping, handling personal affairs during work, etc.)
- Gives little or no explanation when they make a mistake
- Gives little or no praise or sets you up for failure
- Doesn't show any interest or concern in anyone

I have, over the years, realized that employees can be more actively involved in making their job less stressful and more satisfying despite Boss Bullies. I have come to realize that employees can alleviate much of their own stress and to be able to work more effectively in their team.

Here are some ideas to deal with Boss Bullies:

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- **Take Stock** – Take a personal inventory of your strengths and weaknesses. What do you objectively do very well, well, average, not so well, poorly? Where do you need to improve? Could the Boss Bully be at least partially right in identifying a problem (not in their methods)?
- **Document** – Keep a journal of all of the requests as well as hypercritical words used by your Boss Bully, including the date and time, your reactions, and what you would have wanted to occur. By writing the experience down, the negative experience is now out of your head and on paper. You don't have to fester on it ... it's recorded, so you can "forget" it. You will also have a record of events, should you need them.
- **Play** – After a day of hypercritical comments, do something fun and active or quiet (depending on your personality) so you can de-stress. Don't go home immediately. Go to the gym, or, try meditation class, listening to music in the park or going to the library right after work. This allows you to compartmentalize the bad experience, leave it at the activity, and come home in a calmer state of mind.
- **Seek Support** – You need to know that you are not the only one affected or suffering from the boss's mental blows and scorn. Seek affirmation from others who might have similar experiences, compare notes. Or, find a Mentor. Listening to colleagues help you learn new tips and tools for dealing with that difficulty boss.
- **Ask The Boss** – Disarm a Boss Bully by asking for specific feedback on your work. When you ask for comments from a Boss Bully, you get more accurate feedback and less negativity. If s/he doesn't spontaneously say anything about a project you did well, ask specifically about it. Be pleasant, positive, cooperative, and show genuine interest in their opinion. Don't be sarcastic or mocking or defensive. Ask for clarification especially if you detected negativity in their tone. Once you get the clarification, immediately reflect it back to them in slightly different words. This shows the boss that you understand what they said. Then follow-up with an email fairly paraphrasing what you heard. The Boss Bully will usually react better toward you when they hear their own words coming back at them. Boss Bullies often are not even aware of their own negativity. Of course, if they simply do not like you personally, then this probably won't work. Prepare your resume and start looking for another job ... it may take some time, but the situation is not tenable.
- **Ask HR For Mediation** – Depending on your exact circumstances, this may or may not be a good idea. HR is not always neutral and your Boss Bully may not react favorably to this tactic. However, under the right circumstances, it may work in your favor. Do your homework before trying this!
- **Detach:** Regardless of the negativity or criticism, stay calm but disconnected. Your own emotional state is too important to let criticism trample you. Keep your ego apart from what you are experiencing. Remain unemotional and centered, regardless of the boss's affect. Instead try to focus on the criticism and negative body language just enough to understand what is being expected of you. Tell yourself, "Okay, I will just keep doing my best and that's all I can and will do."
- **Stop Holding On To False Hope:** If the Boss Bully is simply negative toward most everyone - although difficult - you may eventually have to face the fact that there is nothing that you can likely say or do to change your boss's negative energy. Accepting that the boss is the way s/he is and that his/her

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criticism is inevitable can be a hurdle. But, it can also be an important milestone. Honor your personal work ethic and do the job to the best of your ability. Stop taking things so personally and let go. Letting go means that you understand and accept the situation as it truly is, but you chose not to internalize your boss's lack of compassion or negativity.

In this recession most employees feel like they are wearing handcuffs ... but these are not the golden handcuffs of past few decades. Many employees feel trapped because of they absolutely need to keep their jobs.

Try to be a bit objective and detached about your situation. Panic will not help you!

Be patient and make some logical tradeoffs. Weigh ALL the factors in a fair and detached manner. For example, is it better to accept some abuse or be unemployed? You have to balance your overall happiness and mental wellbeing against paying the bills, losing your spouse or house, etc..

Everyone's personal reality is a bit different, so carefully plan and take charge of your future.

If you have a particularly difficult situation, a professional counselor or coach may be of great help to you in sorting out your priorities.

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