



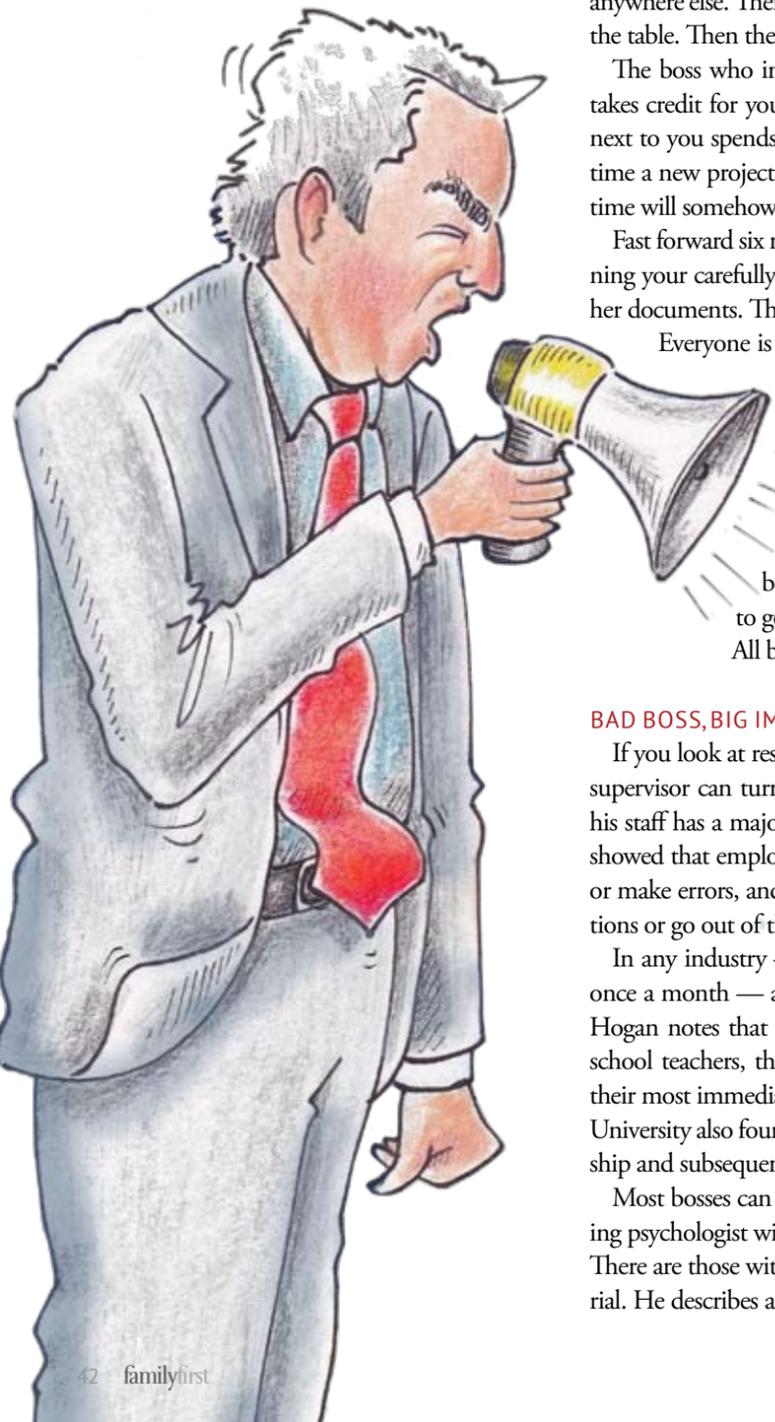
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# HERE COMES THE BOSS

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YOU HAVE A GREAT POSITION, GREAT HOURS, GREAT PAY. BUT YOU DREAD GOING TO WORK – AND IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF THE BOSS. WHETHER HE'S A MINI-DICTATOR, NON-COMMUNICATOR, OR CREDIT HOG, HERE ARE SOME COPING STRATEGIES





## BROCHA MILLER

It's Monday morning, 9 a.m. You file into the conference room for your biannual sales meeting, which you've been dreading for weeks. Your colleagues look like they'd rather be anywhere else. There are anxious glances, fidgeting feet, pens being unconsciously tapped on the table. Then the door opens and in walks The Boss.

The boss who interrupts when you speak, dismisses new ideas by rolling his eyes, and takes credit for your accomplishments. The meeting, predictably, is a disaster. The person next to you spends the whole time texting under the table. Your cubicle mate ducks every time a new project is presented. Everyone in the room keeps glancing at the clock, hoping time will somehow speed up.

Fast forward six months, to your next sales meeting. You enter the conference room, scanning your carefully prepared report. Your coworker opens her laptop and begins reviewing her documents. The boss walks in, holding a pile of folders, and starts the meeting.

Everyone is alert, taking meticulous notes. When the boss asks for input, hands fly into the air. Your colleagues eagerly bounce ideas off the boss, brainstorming possible solutions to the problem at hand.

You think back to six months ago and marvel at the difference. What changed?

Your boss. He was fired a few months ago and replaced by a new manager — one who knows how to lead people, how to draw out their best. You don't dread your job anymore; in fact, you actually look forward to going into the office.

All because of the boss.

### BAD BOSS, BIG IMPACT

If you look at research on the workplace, one thing becomes abundantly clear: a difficult supervisor can turn a good job into a bad one — quickly. To start, the way a boss treats his staff has a major effect on performance levels. A study out of the University of Florida showed that employees with difficult managers were more likely than others to slow down or make errors, and not put in maximum effort. They were also less likely to make suggestions or go out of their way to fix workplace problems.

In any industry — regardless of whether you see your boss once a day, once a week, or once a month — a difficult boss makes a difference in job satisfaction. Researcher Robert Hogan notes that whether a study is done among postal workers, milk truck drivers, or school teachers, the results are identical: About 75 percent of the workforce reports that their most immediate supervisor is the most stressful part of their job. Researchers at Baylor University also found that the tension caused by an abusive boss “affects the marital relationship and subsequently the employee's entire family.”

Most bosses can be divided into two categories, says Dr. Samuel H. Schwimmer, a leading psychologist with 35 years of experience in clinical and industrial corporate psychology. There are those with a collaborative management style — and those who are more dictatorial. He describes a great boss as someone who will create a vision for employees, depicting

## ARE YOU A GOOD BOSS?

With these four management qualities, you can motivate and inspire your employees—and possibly even boost your bottom line.

### DIRECTED

It's a lot easier to lead people when you know where you're headed. Beyond having a clear vision, a good manager knows how to show employees that by accomplishing their individual tasks, together they will achieve a greater goal. One “boss” known for his vision was President Ronald Reagan. He inspired a country using clear and forceful terms, painting a greater picture for the future. He discussed making choices that were black or white, never gray. And he used optimism to encourage citizens to adopt new policies.

### TUNED IN

If employees don't feel like they're being heard, they're less likely to work as hard — or to stick around the company for long. Of all the bosses that Nechama has had in her 10 years at a nonprofit firm, her favorite one always came to meetings with an open mind. “We would get together to discuss an issue, and he would listen to everyone at the table. He would take all the feedback into account, and sometimes even change his opinion, based on everyone else's point of view.”

### DECISIVE

Along with accepting input, a good boss has to know when to step in and make decisions. “You need to be able to understand where people are coming from. But in order to be effective, a leader also has to make his own decisions and do what needs to get done,” says Rabbi Yoel Burtzyn, *menahel* of Bais Yaakov of Los Angeles, who has more than 30 years of experience in *chinuch*. “Shlomo HaMelech said, *Teshuah b'rov yoeitz* — Salvation comes from a multitude of advice.” This does not mean you accept every *eitzah* that is given to you. Rather, you should listen to what everyone has to say, and then you will have the clarity to make a decision on your own. There has to be someone who takes responsibility for making the big decisions.”

### CONSIDERATE

Are you emotionally supportive of your employees? Are you aware of when they have big things going on (such as a death in the family or another personal stressor)? Simply acknowledging issues can go a long way. An employee can size up a supervisor, says Devorah, by seeing how he reacts when you ask for a personal day. “I had one boss who was very sympathetic, always asked if everyone was okay, wishing me a *refuah shleimah*. This made me feel valued and ready to go back to work as soon as I possibly could.”

## ABOUT 75 PERCENT OF THE WORKFORCE REPORTS THAT THEIR MOST IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR IS THE MOST STRESSFUL PART OF THEIR JOB

what he expects from them, and how he will measure results — but then, will give employees the leeway of free thinking, by letting them come up with ideas to meet the qualifications.

“There is truth in the saying; ‘If you want it done right, do it yourself,’” explains Dr. Schwimmer. “But in a large company, this won't be productive. A good manager needs to be the strategic planner, but he also needs a ‘hands-off’ policy to allow employees to accomplish what they need to do. A good boss believes in his employees, and allows them to exercise their own abilities. This allows the employees to grow in their skills, and rise to higher levels within the business itself.

“If a boss is more rigid and expects his employees to only follow his instructions, there's no room for growth. In a dictatorial environment, there will be a higher turnover rate because employees won't have self-satisfaction in their work.”

Of course, not every management style will work in every company. “Depending on the organization or business, different styles of bosses will be called for,” says Dr. Schwimmer. “There is no one style that works best for every business. For example, a dictatorial boss may be very effective in a company that's manufacturing a tangible public product. That business will need to stage and yield precise

products, with no room for error. In a creative business, a more democratic setting will be successful in generating new ideas.”

### A LITTLE MATCHMAKING

Finding the perfect boss “is harder than *shidduchim*,” says Fraida, a 17-year veteran in the workforce. “With a date, at least you get to go out a few times and see if you get along. When job hunting, you interview for the position, and only find out about the boss's personality afterwards.”

Indeed, one of the most important factors when considering a position may be your prospective supervisor. As Mr. Hogan concludes from various Gallup surveys, “People do not quit organizations, they quit bad bosses.”

Fraida recommends doing some research before accepting a position. “Figure out what kind of management styles work for you, and which absolutely will not. You should speak to current and past employees to get a good picture of how the boss works, and see if it will work for you.”

In an article for *Forbes* magazine, reporter Stephanie Taylor Christenson advises people to watch for pronoun usage during interviews. If the boss uses the word “you” when discussing challenges,

don't expect her to provide support. For example, "You will deal with a lot of customer complaints" usually means "I will not be a mentor." If she says "I" when referring to the company's success, that's also a bad sign.

You should also pay close attention to how your prospective boss answers questions, says Caren Goldberg, PhD, an HR professor at the Kogod School of Business at American University. If he is vague about the job description or gives an overly generic response to a specific question, it's possible he's not being upfront with you.

### CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

If you're stuck in a job — and thus stuck with your boss — here are a few coping strategies for some of the most common "nightmare" bosses out there:

#### THE MINI-DICTATOR

You know the type — their management motto is "It's my way or the highway" and they give new meaning to the word bossy. For these domineering supervisors, Dr. Schwimmer recommends analyzing the root of the problem. "You need to figure out why he manages this way. If the boss is mistrusting, you may not be able to grow in that position. You should try to gain as much experience or training as possible, and then find another position. But if you can have a conversation with the boss, and make him feel comfortable in your abilities, allowing you greater leeway to do your work, that would be ideal. Good bosses make their employees feel good about what they do."

Devorah, a school secretary, was too scared to start a dialogue with her supervisor, a woman who was very rigid about the way things should operate. So she tried a different approach: "My boss had specific procedures with rules and forms," Devorah says. "Some of them made sense, but I thought some were pointless or time-consuming. Since I was the one doing the actual work, talking to teachers and filling out the forms, I wanted to make a change. I was too nervous to confront her directly, so I first set up my own process for dealing with new requests. After a week under my new system, I sat down with my boss and showed her how my method helped the office run in an efficient way. Once she saw the results, she agreed to my plan."

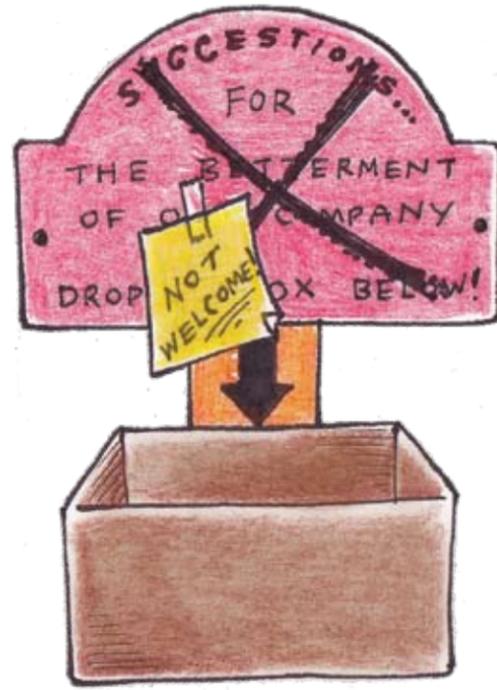
Though it can be risky to try a new system without approval, Devorah is happy she took the leap. "My boss was glad we had open communication. And I was able to show her that I can come up with good ideas, too."

You might also try to understand why your boss is so demanding. Is he getting heavy pressure from his higher-ups? Is he struggling to meet his quotas? Did something just happen in the company that's making him even more dictatorial recently? Putting yourself in his shoes may make it a little easier to tolerate the behavior.

#### THE NON-COMMUNICATOR

You can spot this style of boss by his heavy use of generalities, and phrases like, "you know what I mean" when his employees have absolutely no idea what he means. He fails to articulate his goals, or the steps necessary to implement them — yet he still expects you to read his mind. Even worse, he may not even *know* what he needs, but will nonetheless demand solutions for a problem he can't explain.

For this type of boss, Dr. Schwimmer advises employees to present several options for the boss, and have him decide what to do. Plan ahead so that if he selects choice A, you can have a list of follow-up questions ready. If your boss still can't



## MEN VS. WOMEN

Are male bosses better or worse than female ones? Dr. Samuel H. Schwimmer asserts that you can't really make generalizations: "It's true that women tend to be softer and more engaging with their employees. But I've seen it go both ways."

When it comes to communication styles, however, there's usually a major difference. In *Mars and Venus in the Workplace*, author Dr. John Gray explains that while men and women may be using the same words, they can actually be speaking completely different languages, which can lead to resentment and misunderstandings in the workplace.

For instance, males typically use communication only to convey information. In fact, men who are perceived as competent will generally use the least number of words necessary to make a point. Note to women: Your male boss is not being abrupt — this is just how he addresses issues.

Females, on the other hand, can talk and talk. Aside from relaying information, they often communicate to minimize stress, maintain relationships, or stimulate creativity. Their style of speaking also tends to be more inclusive. In the workplace, a woman may gradually build up to a solution by including feedback from others. Note to men: This doesn't mean she's incompetent — she's just gathering information to better reach a final answer.

express his needs because he's insecure about making final decisions, your best bet is to find a mentor, an experienced person within the company who can help you guide your boss into making the right choice.

This strategy worked for Shevy, who was in the service industry for eight years. "My boss would give me a vague set of instructions for the week, such as, 'We need to figure out our budget on this future project.' I knew I couldn't get clearer instructions out of her, so I would approach my manager, who had been in the company four years longer than me, and she would help me decipher what the boss wanted me to do," she says.

## "PEOPLE DO NOT QUIT ORGANIZATIONS, THEY QUIT BAD BOSSES"

#### THE HOG

With these bosses, the smaller you are, the bigger they feel. Concerned only about their own duties and position in the company, they're quick to take credit for everyone else's good ideas and success. And since they spend most of their time trying to climb the next rung of the ladder, they often don't have a clue about how to run their own department.

"My boss is a smooth talker. She sounds so impressive that she made it to the top," says Atara, who's been working at a service agency for five years. "But, really, she's so out of touch with what we are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. She sits in her office, doing her own thing, and then when it comes time to resolve problems, she has no idea how to help us."

Atara's coping strategy: crystal-clear communication. "When things get difficult, we try to sit down with her and explain the situation, spelling out exactly where we need her to guide or assist us."

When addressing your boss, you have to be assertive, but also remember your place. Doctors Gary and Ruth Namie of the Workplace Bullying Institute recommend keeping your request small and simple. That will up your chances of it actually being fulfilled. And don't verbally attack your boss — use words like "I need" instead of "You should."

If your boss is always stealing your glory, you can try Fraida's approach. To stay positive, she keeps an updated list of her professional accomplishments. "I review the list whenever I need a pick-me-up," she says. Also, at her yearly performance review, she shares her long and detailed list with her boss, to remind him of her worth.

"You're out of luck if your goal is to have your boss say 'Great work!'" says Fraida. People's management styles are usually hard-wired. "Instead, focus on using the job to build your resume."

Indeed, when dealing with a bad boss, the only thing you can really change is yourself. That could mean simply shifting your attitude — or switching jobs entirely. ■