



## Five types of boss and how to handle them

**From my own experience, I know that supervisors and their different leadership styles can present a constant challenge to employees. If you recognize your supervisor's behavior and understand the motivations behind it, you can deal with it better, act accordingly, and develop your own perspectives on issues that matter.**

I've looked at employee surveys to differentiate between the following **five types of boss**:

1. The dominant boss
2. The peacemaker boss
3. The overwhelmed boss
4. The tyrannical boss
5. The ideal boss

In practice, of course, these types can be mixed – people can't always be dominant, and won't always try to achieve peace and harmony. It does, however, help to recognize these types, then build on them to determine the right behavioral strategies for your own specific situation.

In the next sections, I'm going to try and describe the behavior of these different types in more detail and help you understand the best ways to deal with these kinds of people. Only you can evaluate the different behaviors I've suggested for your own situation. Every choice you make, after all, will have consequences – for yourself, for your team, and for your company.

### 1. The dominant boss

The dominant boss is characterized by his strongly decisive nature. He concentrates on what's most important. He's mainly interested in numbers, facts, and results. He expects his team to implement his instructions to the letter. He's able to use his education and his experience to lead his employees to success.

However, this behavior can also have a darker side. Dominant behavior can often mask a fear of failure. If something triggers this fear, this kind of boss tends to want to control everything and everyone. He represses conflicts by barking orders. People who think differently are degraded or given undesirable tasks. Values like openness and respect play a lesser role in achieving company goals.

#### Possible behavioral strategies:

- Let your boss know you respect him and his position, otherwise you run the risk of your boss perceiving you as a competitor.
- Provide him with a brief summary of numbers and facts that support your position.
- Talk to him personally, and explain the useful benefits he can gain by letting you work on a particular task independently. For example: "You will have more free capacity for..."



- Ensure him you will keep him up to date on the project, and ask him the best way to keep him informed (personally, via e-mail, Skype) and how often.
- If you don't want to deal with this leadership style, look for a new position where you can work more independently.

## **2. The peacemaker boss**

The feelings and satisfaction of workers are key concerns for this type of boss. He is friendly, and tries to provide a comfortable working atmosphere. He might be self-satisfied, and praise his own actions. This hides a desire for recognition and approval from his employees. What other people think is even more important to him than the work results achieved. He may make personal sacrifices so that others will like him, since he is afraid of rejection and isolation. Accordingly, he welcomes positive feedback. He sweeps critiques under the rug, and tries to avoid discussions and conflict.

### **Possible behavioral strategies:**

- Ask him to show you and your team what goals need to be achieved within what time frame.
- Set goals for yourself that you want to achieve. This gives you the chance to stand out and move up the promotional ladder.
- Pay attention when new difficulties or new topics come up. Think of solutions, and present your suggestions to your boss. Be sure that you make a positive emotional impression.

## **3. The overwhelmed boss**

This is a situation where the Peter Principle applies: you're working with a boss who has been challenged until he has reached the limits of his professional or social capabilities, and may have already exceeded them. He is attempting to cover up his incompetence with his behavior. He loves to take credit for others' achievements. You may be expected to hand over your work results already ready to be presented or signed off on, so he can pass them on to higher levels under his own name. He delegates as much as possible. This causes workers to feel unsure and overworked. Over time, he will frequently lose respect in the whole department.

### **Possible behavioral strategies:**

- Try to reinforce your relationship with your boss, and attempt to relieve him of tasks that you are better equipped to complete than he is. Document your work for your own purposes, so that later you will have proof of your expanded skill set – for salary negotiations, requesting job references, etc.
- Act in a diplomatic manner, and ask your boss to make decisions that are within his skills, not part of your area of responsibility.
- If you don't feel like you're getting anywhere, look for another job.

## **4. The tyrannical boss**

This type of boss suffers from – carefully concealed – feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, which result in serious character defects. He often treats his subordinates carelessly. His behavior changes, however, when other people are around – especially if they are above him in the company hierarchy or are useful to him in some manner. In this case, he can be friendly and even charismatic. In short: he steps on those below him and panders to those above. He dramatically exaggerates even the smallest mistakes – he becomes aggressive and hurtful, looking for the guilty party and threatening punishment. He has no capacity for self-reflection. His behavior spreads fear. He favors submissive employees who serve to carry out his plans. However, he also often bullies these individuals.

#### **Possible behavioral strategies:**

- Set boundaries for yourself, commit yourself to pressing on, and draw your motivation from your work.
- Try to remain relaxed by imaging you're sitting behind a thick wall of glass. Imagine you're in a situation where you can feel calm, protected, and composed.
- Fortify yourself mentally with affirmations, like “I respect myself and my abilities.” “I am safe and secure.”
- Let your boss get it all out – even if he's screaming. Remain standing or sitting upright. Look your boss in the eyes, and tell him you respect him and expect respect in return, even if you've made a mistake. Build a bridge for your boss so he doesn't lose face.
- If his behavior is affecting you mentally or physically, look for another job. There's no sense in endangering your ability to work by exposing yourself to that kind of situation.

### **5. The good boss**

The good boss is able to use prudent leadership in his team to achieve very good results. His team understands his goals, which are quantifiable and communicated clearly. He trusts his capabilities and the capabilities of his employees. His basic attitude is: I'm OK, and my employees are OK too. He has high demands, supports his employees, and gives them responsibility. He is open to new ideas and suggested solutions from his workers. He maintains good contacts with his employees and is well-informed about the status of projects and contracts. He listens carefully, and a good argument can win him over.

#### **Possible behavioral strategies:**

- Even a good boss appreciates honest feedback. Tell him how much you value his leadership style. But don't fall into flattery!
- Keep your boss up to date on your work area and address any negative developments promptly. This lets you look for solutions before a problem occurs.
- Look for areas of improvement, present your ideas to your boss, and show initiative.
- If you have this kind of boss, it's worth it to stick with him through thick and thin. However, don't place your boss on a pedestal. He's only human, after all, and he does what he can.

If you're unsure of the best way to behave in your situation, talk about it with a colleague or a

coach. I've just got one more tip for you: Don't wait too long to address disagreements. Conflicts with your boss won't usually work themselves out! The longer you suffer through a situation, the tougher it will be to find a mutual solution. I'm happy to support you in defining your best course of action.