

HOW TO DEAL WITH A NIGHTMARE BOSS

THE CONTROL FREAK

The Control Freak will attempt to micromanage your every task and responsibility.



Bombard him with information.

Copy him on every e-mail even remotely involving him or his area of responsibility. Leave towering stacks of reports and copies of all correspondence on his desk. Include him in the most mundane meetings and discussions. You may be able to short-circuit his control mechanism with the sheer volume of data.



Solicit his opinion, but control the options.

If you must leave a decision up to your boss, offer the solution you favor and two or three lame options—ridiculous or unworkable possibilities that will direct him to choose your course of action. Using phrases such as “You’ve probably already thought of this” and “I tried to put myself in your shoes when I worked on this” will help you gain favor.



Remain calm and pleasant.

When your boss interferes with your work or second-guesses your decision, do not become defensive or combative. Say, “How ridiculous—I should have thought of that. Thank goodness I included you!” and

then lead your boss back to your position, while encouraging him to think you’re following his guidance.



Continue to do your job.

Bide your time. Your boss may ultimately believe that he’s shown you the way and he can now go on to help others.

THE BUDDY

The Buddy will generally attempt to blur the lines between employee and supervisor, soliciting personal information and seeking inclusion as though you are the best of friends. Include the Buddy in small ways, but keep your distance.



Invent a hobby.

Avoid sharing intimate details of your real life by inventing a hobby, which you can discuss with her in minute detail. Your fictional toothpick sculptures or love of steam locomotives will become of great interest to the Buddy and can serve as the basis of your “friendship.” Movies, restaurants, and sports are also safe, impersonal topics to raise.



Offer social invitations you know she can’t accept.

Invite her to lunch on a day you are certain she has another appointment. Ask her out for a drink with “the gang” after work on the night she always goes to her yoga class, or when she will be away on business.

Be aware that she may proffer invitations in return, which easily can be evaded by inventing a nightly class of your own.

★ **Avoid hugs.**

If she attempts to throw a friendly arm around you, fake a sneeze. Blame allergies rather than perfume, which she can change. Your “allergies” can then also become a topic of friendly conversation.

THE WORKAHOLIC

The Workaholic has lost all sense of perspective, and has sacrificed his life to his job. He will expect the same of you.

★ **Present evidence of the real world.**

Replace all calendars he sees with ones depicting tropical retreats, ski slopes, or other vacation locales. Litter the office with travel brochures, and purchase office subscriptions to food, travel, and entertainment magazines. E-mail him regularly with weather updates of distant cities.

★ **Discuss family at every opportunity.**

Show him pictures of your family. Show him pictures of his own family. If even your most distant relative has bought a car, won a part in a school play, or suffered a toothache, offer these stories in careful detail—perhaps they will trigger recognition that he, too, has a wife, sister, uncle, or son.

★ **If he has ever discussed a personal interest, become obsessed with it.**

Pounce on any non-work-related subject in the hope of rekindling his own passion. Discuss popular subjects and pastimes to spark some vestigial interest. Try baseball, politics, food, music, and celebrity gossip. Avoid even juicy office gossip, since that will lead him back to work-related issues.

THE TELLER OF BAD JOKES

His jokes are always bad.

★ **Be prepared.**

Steel yourself for the punchline. If you are unable to determine if the punchline has been delivered, watch your boss for response cues such as a long pause or an expectant grin.

★ **Determine the nature of the required reaction.**

A secure boss will be satisfied with a friendly groan and head shaking, while an insecure boss will require a more elaborate show of amusement and appreciation. Respond accordingly.

★ **Fake amusement.**

THE SHOULDER SHAKE—Smile, cover your mouth with one hand, and shake your shoulders up and down. This is especially good for puns.

THE AMUSED CHUCKLE—Smile, look directly at your boss, and say, “Heh, heh, heh.” This is a versatile, all-purpose laugh response.

THE GENUINE GUFFAW—Smile broadly, then let out a single, loud “Ha!” Slap your thigh in amusement. If seated, slap your knee.



Change the subject immediately.

Do not give him the chance to “tell you another one.”

Be Aware

Be on guard for other styles of bad boss behavior, and be prepared to take quick action:

- **THE SUPREME DELEGATOR**

Always willing to accept all of the credit but none of the blame, the Supreme Delegator is really setting up others to take the fall. Although she tries to cloak her behavior in an air of confidence, the Supreme Delegator has very low self-esteem and fears that she will fail.

From the moment a project is handed off to you, through all the key decisions, to the final action, make sure you advise your boss—in writing—of all key decisions and plans. Keep copies. Do not be afraid to proceed as you think best, but be prepared for your boss to disavow all knowledge of the details should there be a problem.

- **THE YES/NO MANAGER**

This boss is ever-increasingly bored with meaningful information, intelligent discussion, and any complexity. He wants every decision reduced to an overly simplified YES or NO.

Present an executive summary, with several alternatives for action. Attach the full report with

well-reasoned, well-documented arguments for each point. If asked for your recommendation, give it orally.

- **THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BOSS**

The Passive-Aggressive Boss puts things off, then complains at the last minute that he has not had enough time. The boss can then blame those above or below him for doing a bad job.

Be firm with deadlines and set them in writing. Involve others in the process when possible. These co-workers can then serve as witnesses to any misbehavior on your boss’s part.

- **THE INDECISION MAKER**

This boss ascended to power by a fluke—he can’t actually make a decision himself. He needs input from three or four different sources in order to feel comfortable in his own shoes.

Present any question to your boss as if you’ve taken an informal survey. Include information from any key employees he’d want to hear from.

- **THE ALL-BUSINESS-IS-PERSONAL MANAGER**

The All-Business-Is-Personal Manager has a seriously dysfunctional life outside of work, and thus cannot ever really separate business life from personal life. He will take everything personally. He has nothing but work to cling to, so make your work time with him enjoyable. One bad day can ruin a whole relationship.