



When Your Boss is a Bully

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No one likes a bully. One would think that bullying would have stopped on the playground in elementary school. It shouldn't have happened there either. Unfortunately, the characteristics that are displayed in youth sometimes carry over into the work place. The best advice that I have found throughout my years of professional experience, is to stay true to yourself and set boundaries for what you will and won't accept. The following advice I have found to be extremely helpful and practical when you find yourself dealing with a bully, especially when they are your boss.

First, you need to recognize that working for a bully is a choice. You can change how you respond or react to your boss, or get out of the situation. Second, if the option of getting out of the situation is not an immediate reality, the following can help you navigate the difficult waters of having a bully for a boss.

If your boss is new to you, and you are just discovering that they are a bully, the following will be helpful. If you have had a 'bully' for a boss for some time, this will still help – and you may need to do some extra work to pull yourself up off the ground and dust yourself off.

1. Remember who you are

You must hold onto your inherent worth as a human being and contributor to the team or organization you are a part of. It may be helpful while you go through this period, or to reconnect with who you are, to read your resume and see all of the accomplishments and experience that you have.

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A boss who comes at you like a bully is consciously or more likely unconsciously trying to put you down to give themselves a boost of confidence. They are insecure at some level about themselves, whether it stems from a childhood incident or an experience in the workplace. It doesn't make anything that they do or say right or appropriate, but it can help put things in perspective.

2. Don't let them rattle you.

Once you are feeling attacked or antagonized by your superior, the natural reaction is to defend yourself. Sometimes that response looks like the child mode where we are justifying what we did or explaining our thinking. Often this causes us to talk faster and at a slightly higher pitch as we work to justify our actions or decisions. Just because they think something does not make them right or accurate.

Slow down and think. Slow down your pace of speaking and ask a clarifying question. "From what I heard you say, you believe....." This not only gives you time to think, it allows you to clarify something that you may have misread or misunderstood. If what you heard the second time is what you heard the first time, then you can buy yourself some time. Try saying things such as, "well I'm not sure I agree with you," or "well let me think about that and get back with you." The point is to not commit or agree with anything they are saying and to buy yourself time to think so that you can respond appropriately.

3. Document every conversation.

Protect yourself and document what is said with each interaction. This will make it much easier to remember when and if you need to pull this out to refer to with HR or an attorney if it gets to that point.

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4. Educate yourself

Become versed on the legal characteristics and description of a 'hostile' work environment. Stay alert to defamatory comments or remarks about anything non-work related that may be said to you. Bullying due to discrimination is never to be tolerated, just as bullying to be bullying should not be tolerated.

5. Detach from the outcome.

Know that you do not deserve anything but authentic, open communication that is intended to help you grow as a professional, not tear you down. Anything outside of that is crossing the line of unnecessary antagonism and abuse.

6. Look for any truth in feedback

While a bully can make you shut down to their aggressive communication style, take a moment and separate the emotion from the feedback to filter through everything that may be said to determine if there is anything valid about the feedback you have been given. There may be a grain of truth or more in what they have told you about your performance, but if the delivery is hostile or over the top in tone, you could miss the whole message.

Take whatever lessons you can learn from your experience navigating the waters with an abusive or unenlightened boss. You will definitely learn how "not" to be when leading, guiding and mentoring others. Sometimes one of the best lessons is to learn how you never want to be, to prevent anyone else from experiencing what you went through.

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As a professionally trained Life Coach and former

C-Level Executive, I am experienced at all types of situations and topics related to human interaction. I have experienced and guided thousands of people from entry-level to executive-level professionals throughout my career.

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