
**These leaders won't drive
employee engagement,
performance, or retention.
They will drive everyone nuts.**

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**SEVEN
TYPES OF**

BAD BOSSES

**AND WHAT TO DO
ABOUT THEM**



It's

pretty much unavoidable. Sooner or later you will find yourself working for a bad boss. ¶ From within the organization, they're easy to recognize. The boss's very talented direct reports keep quitting. Open roles are mysteriously difficult to fill no matter how many qualified candidates kick the tires. You start hearing whispers that he's nine kinds of crazy. ¶ It's cathartic to laugh at the toxic bosses. *Office Space* and *Horrible Bosses* have turned bad managers into hilarious protagonists. But, truth is, it's all fun and games until someone loses a career track. And that's exactly what weak bosses do to their people. Plus, years of academic research have been crystal clear: Bad bosses are bad for business.

Despite this knowledge, many organizations continue to focus on short-term performance at all costs. They're not acknowledging the important role that manager quality plays on sustaining organizational performance over time. Nor are they focused on improving quality.

These days, senior leaders and talent management professionals are often being measured on their ability to groom future leaders—a succession bench for the senior-most roles. They're increasingly looking to big data (social media, web scraping) in combination with more traditional

formal assessment practices (personality measures, 360-feedback). While this is good for creating the leadership bench, it's not great for building managers' skills.

There's also an absence of effort and education aimed at helping people ameliorate negative behaviors, or the dark side. We're not just talking about the dark triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Rather, those more basic bad behaviors that we have all experienced. It might have been okay to operate with a blind eye in the past, when talent was everywhere, but today companies are competing to

attract and retain millennials. For that, you need high-quality managers.

What are these bad behaviors exactly? They're the ones mostly likely to drive you crazy as a direct report. They also drive good people out of the organization.

What follows are the seven types of bad bosses. You might disagree with our choices, but for us, these are the big bad seven. Some bad bosses are just one of these types; others are two or three or even four. There may even be a few bosses in corporate America who are batting 1.000—seven for seven. If you report to one, make no mistake: You're out.



The Empty Suit

DEFINITION: *He doesn't do any of his (or her) own work and makes commitments willy-nilly that his people must fulfill.*

YOU MIGHT BE AN EMPTY SUIT IF: *Your employees assume they're working this weekend, but you know you won't be.*

There is nothing more inspiring than being confronted with a challenging work assignment—yes, one that requires evenings and weekends—and having your manager show up, sleeves rolled, ready to help. They're part of the team and willing to do what it takes, just like you.

The Empty Suit will never be there or inspire you in such a way. For them, work rolls downhill. The really skilled and ambitious ones

even learn to delegate to others outside their direct team as well. The result: demoralized employees, especially if the manager uses the time he or she gains back for frivolous activities and then takes credit for the results anyway.

Even worse are managers who commit their employees to assignments with little or no consideration for the burden it creates. This is a matter of respect. Managers who check with

employees before making commitments that impact their workload are viewed as respectful and concerned about work-life balance. Such respect is usually met with an authentic willingness of employees to go above and beyond.

With an Empty Suit as a leader, the work may still get done, but as incidents accumulate the manager depletes all goodwill that could be called upon when the chips are down.

The Backpedaler

DEFINITION: *When cornered, this boss makes promises that he or she has no intention of keeping.*

YOU MIGHT BE A BACKPEDALER IF: *You hate disappointing employees so much that, every time you must say no, you like to leave a few breadcrumbs of hope.*

Bosses should avoid making promises for three reasons. First, employees hear what they want to hear. If you present a possibility to avoid disappointing them, they'll latch on. "We will see" can be interpreted by as commitment to action. And it can quickly become an elephant in the room that drives a wedge between the employee and manager with both parties assiduously avoiding the issue.

Second, time passes quickly in today's workplace. A wide range of issues can pop up between when a promise is made and the time to act. Time has a funny way of deteriorating what parties agree to, especially when such agreements are verbal and made in the heat of battle, out of desperation, or a desire to be done.

In fact, the employee is likely far more invested and may distort the promise in ways that favor his or her perspective. Managers, on the other hand, may



But Wait, Haven't There Always Been Bad Bosses?

Yes. But in the '80s and '90s, talent was abundant. Organizations were free to focus on the bottom line at the expense of culture. It wasn't until the dot-com boom that research revealed that people join (good) companies but leave (bad) managers.

That's when organizations like IBM, Johnson & Johnson, and

PepsiCo began exploring the use of values, upward feedback, and people results in their performance management programs. The theory was if everyone develops better managerial skills, the overall culture will become stronger as well.

That emphasis waned when companies started differentiating and segmenting

talent by future leadership potential instead of building broad-based capability.

But, good news: This is changing again. The millennial generation defines success quite differently than the gen X'ers did. It's not about money and title; it's about personal growth and job satisfaction. And for that, you need quality managers.

minimize a promise over time because of competing interests or issues.

The third reason making promises is a bad idea: They may be used by a manager to manipulate an employee. Unscrupulous managers have few qualms when it comes to getting employees to do things. They may believe things move fast enough that they will not be held accountable. They may believe the end justifies the means. They may simply not care. Whatever the reason, such behavior is reprehensible as it causes employees

to take a "fool me once" attitude toward the manager.

There's a subtle difference here between those who are carelessly clueless and those who are carefully clever. The carelessly clueless are simply bad managers. They promise jobs to people when the roles don't exist yet or have not been wired at all. The carefully clever, however, are more insidious. They know exactly what they're doing and make promises in ways that allow them just enough wiggle room when the time comes to deliver.

Important note: There's

a fine line between being manipulative and appropriately motivating one's team. Good managers find ways to be transparent about what's known and unknown. Bad managers simply gloss over the complexities and hope it all works out. When it doesn't, they blame senior management or the system.

The Credit Stealer

DEFINITION: *Takes credit for a large volume of work their employees complete or claims ownership of work when it exceeds expectations. This boss is especially frustrating when his suit is empty too.*

YOU MIGHT BE A CREDIT STEALER IF: *Fellow c-suite execs say things like, "Wow, I don't know how you have time for it all." Also, you can't remember ever failing, but your team regularly does.*

The worst iteration of The Credit Stealer is theft of an idea. Unlike skills or even effort, both of which can be viewed as fungible, employees view their ideas as uniquely their own. In the knowledge economy, having credit taken is even more disheartening to early career employees. Managers quickly garner a reputation for being untrustworthy.

Once trust erodes, it's



nearly impossible to recover. Employees will be reluctant to share their ideas. The trust question will persist as a nagging drag on employee performance. This ultimately breeds skepticism and creates a downward spiral that results in reduced innovation and idea hoarding.

The Janus-Faced

DEFINITION: *This boss hides behind closed doors, throwing employees under the bus anytime there's a problem to face. Duplicious is a word that comes to mind. Also, asshole.*

YOU MIGHT BE JANUS-FACED IF: *You haven't said "I take responsibility" to a superior in the past 12 months.*

Employees expect three things from their manager. First, accurately represent them as people and employees to others throughout the organization (advocate). Second, when there's a problem, give them the feedback they need to get back on track (player-coach). Third, watch their back and protect them from others who might have a different agenda (cover provider).

Some managers are seriously lacking in one or more of these areas. They may exaggerate, embellish, or simply report falsehoods with respect to personal or

business aspects of their employees. Others are quick to switch sides and support their bosses' or colleagues' needs (or their own) at the expense of an employee's interests or goals. These are character flaws that the boss may engage in unwittingly, or worse, with manipulation and malice.

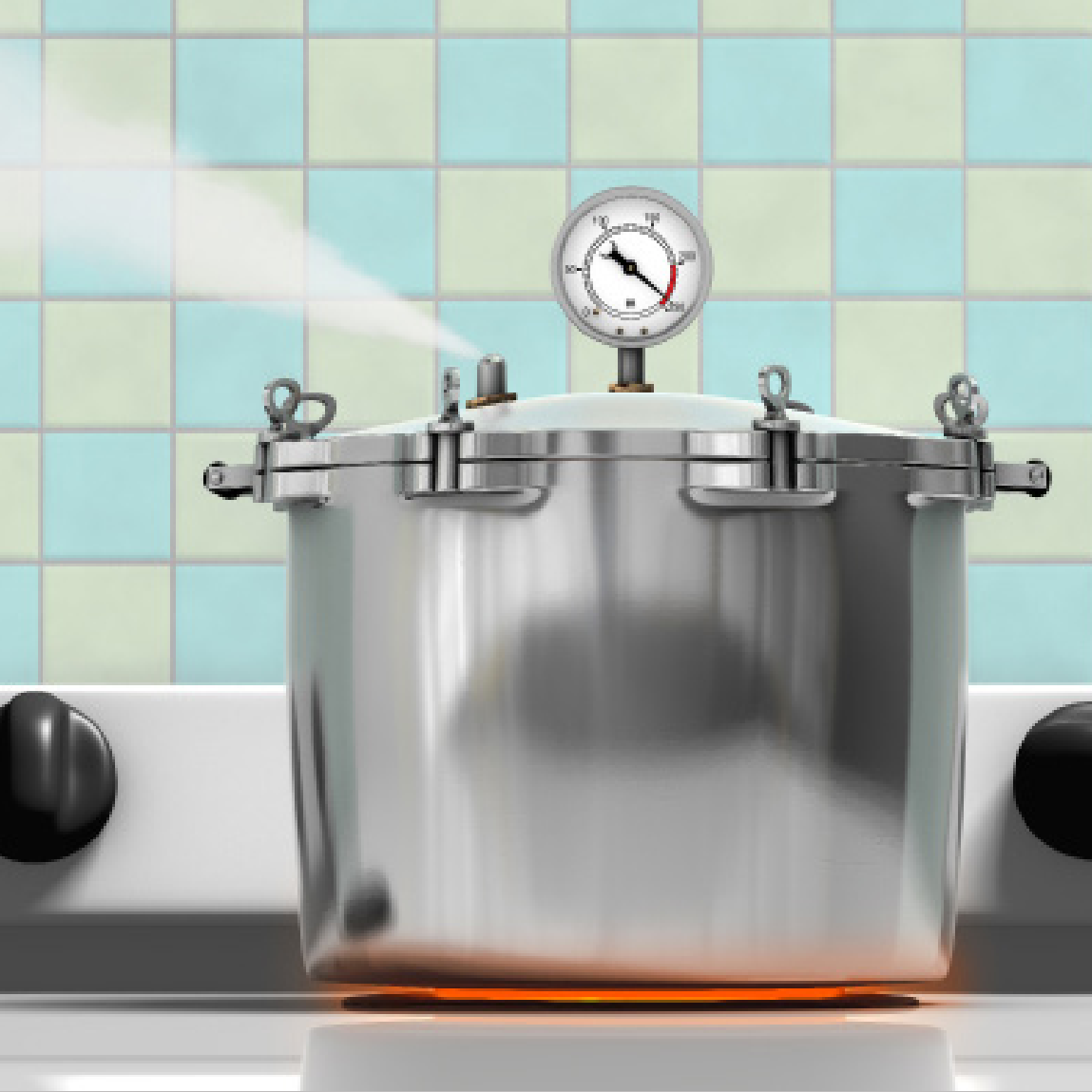
Failing to give accurate (or any) feedback is a more common problem. Consider the situation in which a manager discusses an employee's performance shortcomings with superiors but never engages the employee. This can escalate to the point that an employee is a dead man walking among superiors and, at times, even peers or subordinates.

The penultimate event for this situation is the manager firing an employee for performance. We describe it as penultimate because it's followed by complete shock on the part of an employee who was never given the appropriate feedback.

The Meddler

DEFINITION: *Goes too deep and micromanages everything.*
YOU MIGHT BE A MEDDLER IF: *You want something done right, you have to do it yourself.*

Empowered employees take initiative, own the results of their actions, look for



The Caustic

DEFINITION: *Berates employees in front of others. There's nothing more humiliating for an employee than to be publicly chastised by a manager.*

YOU MIGHT BE CAUSTIC IF: *You describe yourself as short-tempered, and do so with a sly smile. When angry, you often think to yourself: Everyone needs to hear this.*

It's one thing to be called on the carpet in the privacy of an office. It's unpleasant, even embarrassing, but very different from a public dressing down. In the latter situation, the performance issue becomes secondary, while the reputational damage becomes the employee's primary concern.

Even if the whispers are sympathetic, the employee on the receiving end has to endure the gossip that follows. This reinforces the prominence of the event and serves as an unwelcome reminder that lingers for weeks or even months. It only makes sense then that an employee would carry a grudge. And the employee usually doesn't learn anything—they're left shocked at your immaturity.

So is the entire organization, in fact, as word travels fast. People naturally dislike when a powerful person belittles someone with less power. This won't be

easily forgiven or forgotten. People have very long memories for emotional outbursts from people in positions of authority. We are brought up to expect authority figures to maintain control over their emotions.

In fact, a positive and controlled disposition is one of the first characteristics we look for in leaders. Losing your cool is a sure sign of a bad manager and a poor senior-level executive. Publicly humiliating an employee is a surefire way for a manager to garner a reputation for being unable to function under pressure.

If these types of incidents are severe or frequent enough, the results can be quite career limiting—for all parties involved.

The Aimless

DEFINITION: *This boss regularly sends employees on fool's errands or knowingly has them complete meaningless tasks.*

YOU MIGHT BE AIMLESS IF: *You're swimming in data, talking points, and backup material you have no use for.*

Cautious managers who have a difficult time making decisions use the fool's errand as a key delay tactic. Employees who are victimized quickly become cautious too. They delay confronting a manager with a



opportunities, and generally conduct themselves in ways that put the interests of the organization first.

Micromanagement is the number-one empowerment killer. If you want to slow innovation, kill risk taking, and make sure employees quit having ideas and opinions, start micromanaging.

It doesn't take much to ensure that an employee checks with a manager before taking any action. A few redlines to a document that an employee has worked hard to complete, a few requests to redo an assignment, a bit of hovering as an employee tries to hit a deadline, and, voilà, disempowerment. The more times

a manager sends an employee back to redo a presentation, program, process, or project (simply because it is not exactly the way a manager wants it, not because it was poorly done), the greater the chances of the employee developing learned helplessness.

Some micromanagers focus on how an assignment is done. This can often be overcome if the employee simply adopts a micromanager-approved approach. It may even be more efficient and could even result in better output. The more dysfunctional form of micromanagement is when nothing is ever good enough. This form is

particularly disempowering when the micromanager provides little guidance with respect to the desired outcome. It is like throwing darts with a blindfold on ... hitting the mark is almost a chance outcome.

One last point about micromanagement. We often mistakenly view it as the purview of managers. But the truth is, anybody who receives work and provides feedback can be a micromanager. All it takes is a lack of guidance and an unwillingness to accept an output based on personal preference. All employees are capable of using these behaviors to the detriment of the performance of others.

decision that could result in creating more work for themselves. They may configure information, even making it inaccurate or slanted, to encourage the manager to decide already. They may enlist others to help force a decision to avoid another fool's errand request. This is called managing your manager and it takes significant energy and effort away from doing actual work.

Smart employees learn to use the tactic to turn the tables on their managers to avoid work. They solicit a meaningless or diversionary decision in anticipation of he or she finding a reason to delay action. The hope is that the more time it takes, the less likely they'll be sent down some rabbit hole.

All in all, this is a very

dysfunctional situation that reduces productivity.

We all know leaders who engage in the behaviors above. Even great managers can slip into one in a moment of weakness. The good news is that these bad behaviors can be addressed

through a combination of feedback and training.

But it does take commitment to change. For the individual, it's about capitalizing on learning agility and the motivation to build new skills. For the organization, it's about ensuring there's a dedicated focus on—and resources against—building quality management.



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