

The boss didn't come with a user manual – till now!

# IS YOUR BOSS MAD?

The definitive  
guide to  
coping with  
your boss

Jill Walker



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Crown House Publishing Ltd  
[www.crownhouse.co.uk](http://www.crownhouse.co.uk)  
[www.chpus.com](http://www.chpus.com)

First published by

Crown House Publishing Ltd  
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK  
**www.crownhouse.co.uk**

and

Crown House Publishing Company LLC  
6 Trowbridge Drive, Suite 5, Bethel, CT 06801, USA  
**www.chpus.com**

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First published 2007. Reprinted 2007.

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British Library of Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue entry for this book is available  
from the British Library.

**10-digit ISBN 184590039-1**  
**13-digit ISBN 978-184590039-7**

**LCCN 2006932136**

Printed and bound in the UK by  
Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire

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# Introduction

The alarm clock rings loudly, your heart jumps; can it really be morning already? It feels like only a minute since your head hit the pillow. The dawn of a new day has arrived! You roll over in bed with the sound still ringing in your ears! And you lie there thinking, “I have to get up! Another day, another dollar.” But just like yesterday, and probably tomorrow, you are not leaping out of bed, full of joy, nor looking forward to the new day with all its challenges and satisfying effort. Of course, you could easily claim that we would all rather not work at all, but the hard reality is that most of us have to work, and most of us don’t enjoy it as much as we would like.

These are the days of your life. Every moment is precious. You must decide: are you going to rerun the bitter twisted memories of your so-called working life, focusing on the regrets and wishing you had had the guts to do something different; or are you going to bask in the happy memories of days spent in satisfying, productive toil, knowing that was a job well done?

You may not have realised that you have that choice. However things turn out, remember that in some way you are always in a position where you do have some power to make choices, even if that choice is to walk away. It may come to that, but first you need to be aware of the other options available.

## What changed?

Once upon a time you attended a great interview. Suddenly the future offered you a glimpse of some of its richness, and you were only too eager to get going. And then ... The interesting question is: what happens between that initial enthusiastic, “I want to do a good job! Be successful”, and the steady decline into despondency when your plans do not work out as expected (tip: they never do) and your work becomes the place you dread, so much so that you will do almost anything to avoid it? How does ‘an opportunity to work with a great team’ so often turn into a coro-

nary-inducing scenario? What shift in the universe turns you from being a happy weekend person into a grizzly, unhappy weekday, work-mode person?

Can you imagine a world where work *is* satisfying? Where you feel valued and feel you want to give your employer your total loyalty? Maybe you did once? So what happened to erode that desire?

What makes the difference between the workplace you dread and the workplace you enjoy? To a certain extent, it is the company processes, possibly decided by distant decision-makers who may or may not have a total grasp of life 'at the coalface' that dictate your experience. The rules that govern your work-life can crush the creativity and personality you want to bring to your role in order to serve the requirements of the greater organisation. But it's not just the place or the processes, it's the people you work with who govern the mood of the workplace. And above all, it is that particular person who manages you, your BOSS, who exerts the greatest influence. Without doubt, the personality and behaviour of your boss carries the greatest impact on whether you enjoy your work or not.

### **The simple solution to solving this problem**

I always advocate that every person involved in people management needs training. However, training is only the first step; it can help, but it does not ensure good management. As employees, we are still at the mercy of managers who can be abusive, bullying, sarcastic, aggressive, ineffectual or lazy. So another solution – one which you can be actively involved in yourself – is to find ways of learning how to deal with such bosses, who are there in great numbers in the real world of employment. What you need is a guide, which offers the help, the strategies and the tools you need to cope with managers, both trained and untrained.

It may seem obvious that your boss is a human being ... but sometimes it is easy to forget! Bosses arrive at the workplace, more through luck than judgment, carrying, just like the rest of us, a huge invisible sack slung heavily over their multi-chipped shoulder, containing their bruised egos, paranoia and complicated neuroses. In addition, bosses carry with them the burden of having to live up to what we expect from them. This is the

disconnect that we will be exploring. One place to start is to understand what motivates and drives your boss, and which human frailties they bring to work. Once you can recognise these factors, you are in a position to start to take action.

Unfortunately, bosses do not come with a user's manual. You have to work it out for yourself: "Why does he make such strange requests? How come I can't predict what mood she will be in today? How can I tell if he has a sense of humour? Why does she think I will perform under this amount of pressure? Why doesn't he understand me? Why doesn't she help me? Why can't I talk to him? Why can't things be more friendly...?"

This book seeks to examine the behaviour of nine kinds of bosses, through case studies, and in doing so create profiles. Some of these profiles may be familiar to you; they are all types that cause misery in the workplace. They are based on true stories recounted by friends, family, and colleagues. But don't pay too much attention to the different companies or environments in which they are set; it is more important to recognise the profiles. (I have deliberately not enhanced the details of the companies or organisations involved.)

This is not a book about the particular personalities of some bosses, but a guide that will help you recognise generalities and deeper patterns, and how personal pressures, fears and drivers influence the 'mad' behaviour of bosses.

These case studies come not just from my personal experience of having bad bosses, but also from my headhunting and recruitment days. Sadly, working with many managers as candidates, I developed a healthy lack of respect for those people who called themselves 'bosses' – but a real appreciation of the good ones. The experience also taught me to be comfortable talking to anyone regardless of seniority, and confident enough to ask and probe them with what, on the surface, could have appeared inappropriate questions. It now seems second nature for me to ask about topics such as family and hobbies. Some people would think these are not necessarily the things one 'should' ask when meeting a business leader or boss, but they start to give you insight into the personality behind the title.

As with any kind of typology, few are pure types, most are mixtures. As your particular boss is almost certainly a combination of profiles, I will describe the range. This will help you sort out who you are dealing with, as this will be useful when creating your strategies. Having identified the profile(s) of your boss, I shall explore some of the possible causes of the particular traits they are exhibiting, and suggest some suitable strategies for coping for each profile. These strategies are designed to help you manage your workplace environment to your advantage and generally improve how you manage your working life.

### Fluffy gurus

You have probably read or come across management books that talk in abstract terms, describing leadership or management styles, training methods and complicated methodology. Those books all assume that you are dealing with rational human beings. This book is different. It does not refer to lofty ideals that in our real world are beyond the reach or comprehension of your average boss (sadly the majority are average) or employee; instead, it deals with nuts-and-bolts tactics for coping. To help you manage your working situation, there are detailed instructions, and even, in some cases, the appropriate language forms to use. This isn't an 'ideal world' theory manual; it throws a line down into the mire so that you can drag yourself out!

Above all else, remember that you are not alone. By sharing in the experiences of the people mentioned in this book you will realise the world is full of mad bosses and that it is possible to work for one and still have a life. With my help, you should be able to evolve a strategy to cope with or even improve your situation. Once you begin to understand why you have found yourself (or constantly find yourself) in a difficult, uncomfortable or unhappy work situation, you will be able to cope with things so much better. Once you are taking responsibility and behaving proactively, rather than playing victim, you will experience an immediate level of relief. I want you to enjoy your job, to be free of tension, and to be a part of helping your workplace become a happier environment.



Yes, it is possible to have harmony in your workplace, and it is possible for you to implement ways of creating the changes you would like, or at least start the process towards achieving them. And that means that one day you will look back at your working life, and smile ...

## Chapter Four

# *Friend Then Foe Then Friend Again*

Quick check this boss:

- Moody
  - ◆ What will he be like today? This afternoon?
- Aggressive
  - ◆ Why didn't he just ask me? No need to shout!
- Inconsistent
  - ◆ Yesterday he said to do it the other way!
- Forgetful
  - ◆ That's not what we agreed!
- A loner
  - ◆ Why doesn't he sit with the team?
- Scruffy
  - ◆ Looks like he could take better care of himself

This boss links closely to:

- *Mr Long Hours*
- *I Hired You, Now I Hate You*

I think you will recognise this one straightaway. Our first case study comes from Stacey. Stacey was in her late twenties when she was headhunted by an American software company based in central London, to be part of a small sales team. The company had an HQ in the US and about 15 employees in the UK. Stacey told me about the company and how it was positioned. The business was described to her as having ‘software solutions’ which, whilst they were complex and ‘cutting edge’, were applications that had practically no competition in the market.

Stacey is a typical sales person. Highly motivated by success and praise, she had always performed best when in an environment where she received recognition for her skills. Coming from a young, energetic team who bounced ideas around, worked closely and with lots of support, the small intense ‘start up’ environment she was about to encounter would be a challenge ...

### Stacey’s story

The role: sales and business development for a software company.

Stacey remembers how well it started. She had a very smooth interview process. The managing director, to whom she was to report, held three interviews, one of which was a very touchy-feely role-play session. “How enlightened,” she thought!

In this story, we shall call the MD Peter. Stacey recalls how charming he was.

*“I remember he was very keen to tell me about how profitable the company was. He told me that there were great career opportunities as the company was expanding rapidly. Peter seemed relaxed and professional.*

*“Looking back I probably should have asked more about Peter’s background and the company’s management team based in the US. He had given me pretty specific details on the financial state of the company. As my previous company had always been struggling with financial problems, it was just a relief to have the prospect of being with a suc-*

*cessful company. I was really excited about the prospect of having the opportunity of being with such a professional outfit and was flattered about being headhunted for the first time.”*

Reflecting on her experience, Stacey could see her first mistakes. Peter had made her feel very welcome, conducted a very thorough interview process, and communicated a very positive view of the company. It would have been difficult for either of them to have really faulted this part of the process – except that Stacey hadn’t asked enough questions of her future new boss. Additionally, she didn’t ask to speak to any members of the team she was to join, and worst of all, she was attracted by the financial position of the company, and used that as the main criteria for her decision to join. Cash flow had been a big problem at her previous company, so the appeal of the new company’s financial security was a big part of her feeling good about the decision to join.

This is a good example of how, as in other relationships, we can react in a mercurial way to given traits, status, personality or any other stimulus. We are drawn to situations that appear to be the antithesis of former experiences. But in the world of job-hunting this is a mistake. Although it’s tough, it’s essential that you look at situations (vacant) in an objective state of mind. Of course you want to work for a successful company with a healthcare scheme, a subsidised canteen, and your own parking space. But what matters more are the people you are surrounded by and with whom you will interact on a daily basis. Those are the key factors that will most strongly influence your personal success and happiness.

Peter was charming, smiled freely and painted a wonderful picture. Stacey couldn’t wait to start. The organisation was doing so well. She was just what they had been looking for. She would be a great addition to the team. When can she start?

On the surface everything seems well organised. Stacey is looking forward to working with her new boss, whom she can see is very keen and works hard. The job will be a challenge; there are deadlines and targets. As she passes through the office after her final interview and receiving the job offer, everyone in the modern quiet office seems very focused. What a great opportunity ...

## Chapter Seven

# *No Power Boss*

### Quick check this boss:

- Friendly
  - ◆ Joins all the team events
- Appeasing
- Weak, ineffectual
  - ◆ Wants to be your 'friend'
  - ◆ Fails to intervene when needed
- Scared of some employees
  - ◆ Afraid of demanding results
  - ◆ Afraid of being disliked

### This boss links to:

- *I Hired You, Now I Hate You*

This boss may not be so friendly but they abandon you in your moment of need

- *Friend Then Foe Then Friend Again*

In his lucid, friendly moments he can fail to act decisively

### The universal excuse

You may find yourself in a situation where you have been asked to do something that you really do not want to do, can't do, or are not prepared to do. Instead of making an excuse which is an attempt to

justify your non-compliance for whatever reason, a more efficient way is to use the universal unassailable excuse.

The universal unassailable excuse is the excuse you give your boss, colleague, or anyone else, to let them know you will not be doing what they have requested. You tell them you cannot do it for ‘personal reasons’.

I first came across this little gem in my recruitment days, when I saw my senior clients ducking out of important meetings, not taking posts they were offered or generally getting out of anything they didn’t fancy.

They would simply say, “I can’t make that meeting I’m afraid, it’s because of personal reasons.” And that would be the end of it. The beauty of this statement/response is that 99% of people will not question it.

Say it in a slightly ‘serious’ voice and it’s nearly guaranteed, no one will pry, no one will question. People, although they will wonder what’s going on, are almost universally bound by an etiquette that will not permit them to probe.

As with other tactics suggested in this book, the way to get the best results is to use a mix-and-match approach for your strategies. You cannot overuse this excuse. No one will take it seriously if you say it three times a week – just like some of the other strategies. Use it when you really need it, for example like when you need the ‘sickie’ day.

## Characteristics/profile of the No Power Boss

The *No Power* boss is a completely ineffectual individual and is almost the opposite of the *Power Crazy* profile. On occasion you could find yourself practically begging this boss to make changes, and find that they consistently fail to take action on the various issues in the workplace.

This person:

- is insecure, they harbour a deep desire to be liked
- is unable to handle/shies away from any type of confrontation
- feels that if they ask for something to be done and it doesn't happen they are unsure how to enforce it
- lacks assertiveness
- doesn't want to rock the boat

This is the boss who may ignore a safety issue because they feel they haven't the authority to make a fuss within the organisation, to request or demand action. They may have asked an employee to fix something and the instruction may have been ignored.

This boss allows issues, disputes or inequalities between colleagues to go unresolved because they are frightened or unable to discipline an employee. They may not be able to manage a situation where one person in the team is bullying another. They are cowards, they are scared of not being liked and they are scared of confrontation. They think that the way to get people to do things is to get them to like you.

Another version of this is a boss who has been given the title of a boss but in fact has *No Power*. There may be issues that need sorting but the 'boss' in this case has not the funds, resources or recognised authority to make the necessary changes. This is also another version of unacceptable management. They just do not have the power you think they have. They have the title but no change in their level of authority has been implemented. They can be the cause of misery, discontent and anger, have no way to fix the problems and are worse than useless.

Then there is the *No Power* boss who has all the power, the authority to make changes and implement new process, discipline staff and remove troublemakers – but won't.

I came across it during a course on personality profiling, where it was referred to as the 'Jesus profile'. These bosses find it very difficult not to see things from the other point of view. They can be a deeply emotional person, projecting their personal response to situations on to others, not real-

'A company is like a tree full of monkeys. The ones at the top look down and all they see is lots of happy faces smiling up at them. The monkeys down below look up into the branches above and all they can see are arseholes ...'

## If you've ever suffered because of the behaviour of a bad boss, this is the book for you.

*Is Your Boss Mad?* will teach you how to deal with bosses who are bullies or who let you down. It allows you to identify, from the interview process onwards, what sort of boss you may be letting yourself in for. The strategies suggested for coping with your mad boss are not hypothetical; they are practical instructions to improve your communication skills, body language and actions.

## The boss didn't come with a user manual – till now!

This is also a book for the bosses. There is a recognised link between happy employees and happy customers, and it's accepted that a happy customer is likely to be more valuable than an unhappy one. Do you have happy employees?

"This is much more than an inspired self-help guide for the embattled employee. Jill Walker's knowledgeable and entertaining book should be required reading for managers everywhere. They say that people work better when they feel good about themselves, so how hard can good management be? Keep this book visible. They'll know you're on to them."

**Mark Bradley, author, consumer columnist**

"This book could save your life. It's a surgical handbook for managing your boss better than they manage you."

**Guy Browning, Guardian Columnist**



In the course of **Jill Walker's** career as an executive with a software company she has travelled extensively and had contact with executives from many of the US and UK's top 500 companies. The experience and knowledge she has gained has given her a clear insight into the world of business management, which she has now coalesced into this, her first book on the subject.

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Business/Personal Development UK £12.99



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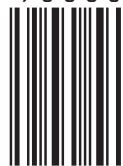
[www.chpus.com](http://www.chpus.com)

Design Thomas Fitton Photography Brian Brown Photography

ISBN 978-184590039-7



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9 781845 900397