

Ethically Speaking



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I hope you have a good boss that you trust. Your boss influences your life while you are at work and when you are not at work. A bad boss haunts you. Job-retention studies have found that the dominant reasons a person quits a job are related to the boss. Changing jobs is not easy. Running from a bad boss is not always the answer, either. A boss usually has a boss, too, so your good boss may change jobs to get away from a bad boss, as well. Plus, changing jobs always involves some pain (like moving) or risk (the grass is always greener on the other side). So, what do you do about a bad boss?

2. Put up and shut up. If you are in your job for a short time, then it is probably best to try to wait the boss out. Of course, this strategy is not appropriate in cases of harassment, threats, etc. For instance, if you are working on a six-month project and change to a new project with a new boss, then you might do well to endure the six months. Don't forget, bosses change jobs, quit, get promoted, or get transferred. Patience may be your best virtue.

3. Quit. This should be your last resort, unless you are ready to move on anyway.

Strategies for Coping with a Bad Boss

1. Communicate. Lack of communication is the root of many problems. Try talking to your boss. If your boss is reasonable, you may be able to suggest ways to establish better communication lines. Sometimes, actions are misinterpreted. An employee may be leaving early because she came in early, and not because she is "sneaking out." A boss can forget, so reminding her that you are leaving early can prevent the start of suspicions that can grow into poor relations.

Things to Avoid

1. Telling your boss off. Raising your voice, getting emotional, or putting your boss in her or his place are inappropriate. Learn self control. Try to reduce contact with your boss for a period of time to help you regain control. You never know: you might get on better terms with your boss, or need a recommendation for a transfer or promotion.

Table 1. Types of bosses, and methods of dealing with them.

Type of boss	Characteristics	How to cope
Micromanager	This type of boss must ok your every move and know what you are doing all the time. He or she will sit down next to you and tell you what to type on a computer.	This boss micromanages because there is a lack of trust. You must find ways to encourage trust: always be prepared, hand in work on time, schedule reviews, etc.
Passive-aggressive	Charming facade, poor communicator, doesn't tolerate disrespect, uses retribution, procrastinator, and stubborn.	Don't argue, keep well informed, easier to get forgiveness than permission, flattery.
Credit stealer	Insecure, steals your ideas, likes the attention, may be very intelligent	Nicely approach and talk about the importance of the team, be careful but let her or him know you deserve credit.
Workaholic	Unreasonable standards, doesn't respect your free time.	If your boss is working at least as hard as you, then communicate your concerns. If your boss is lazy, then communicate your concerns but be ready for a fight.
Incompatible	Bad working relationship, always has opposite opinions, frustration.	This type of boss may just be your own excuse for not working or wanting to quit. If not, try to mutually identify problems and find ways to work around them. If you can't, then quit.
Retired in place	Provides no guidance or help, disrupts productive work with mindless tasks, you are on your own.	Communicate, ask for specific advice or help, and discretely get help from the boss's boss, if necessary.

2. Mutiny. Getting other people angry or upset about the boss can have a devastating effect on the organization. Is it really worth hurting the organization? Does team spirit and a high work ethic compensate for the poor boss?

3. Stop performing. If you lower your performance, you and the organization will probably get hurt worse than your boss. You need good job skills and performance recommendations to get better jobs. Also, you are just giving the boss fuel to fire you, or to give you a lower raise.

4. Quitting too fast. If you quit every time you encounter job difficulties, then you will be perpetually job hopping. Loyalty and perseverance are admirable qualities in a worker.

I've listed some boss types and methods of dealing with them in Table 1. Bosses often have inadequate training to assume their positions. Consequently, a boss may be in over his or her head, and

may tend to develop toward one of the boss styles listed in the table.

I'd like to try something different in this column. I'll call it "Dear Randy." You can send me an example of what you consider an ethical problem, and I will try to give some advice. Of course, we will sanitize your situation, so that you can't be identified. If you have any ideas, send them to my coordinates, listed above. When I get enough input, we'll try the idea once. If it goes over okay, we can repeat it.

The material in this column was influenced by my own ideas, plus the following Web sites:

http://youngbiz.com/career_gears/bigbadboss.htm

http://www.iviliage.com/work/workingdiva/mybrilliantcareer/articles/0,10109,204196_97286,00.html

http://www.cio.com/archive/040100/badboss_content.html ☞

Movie Review: *The Dish*

A movie with an antenna as the hero? Yes, as all of our Australian colleagues know, *The Dish* is that movie. Unlike the movie *Contact*, which used the Arecibo reflector and the VLA more as a backdrop, this movie is centered on the 64-meter Parkes radio telescope in New South Wales, Australia. The storyline is about how the dish played a key role in providing television from the moon when Apollo 11 made the first landing, in 1969.

Few US engineers seem to be aware of this picture, although a number of antenna engineers have told me they saw it on airline flights in recent months. Made in 2000 and shown in US theaters in early 2001, the movie was recently released on VHS tape and DVD. *The Dish* is one of the highest-grossing Australian films in that country's history. The DVD version currently sells for \$15.99 from Amazon.com.

The movie stars well-known Australian actor Sam Neill, whose role is Director of the radio-telescope facility. He is most recognized in the US for his starring roles in *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic Park III*. In reality, Neill is an actor who has had parts in close to forty movies. Neill's counterpoint is the by-the-book NASA supervisor who is stationed on site. Although both of their roles are serious, a great deal of comedy is provided by the supporting cast, who play quirky residents in Parkes.

The movie contains numerous popular songs from the time, which brought back great memories. Film footage from the launch and the moonwalk was also included. I was working on my PhD at UCLA at the time, and remember this time very well. The film made it possible to relive the memories of that great event in our history. It also showed that the Apollo 11 success had a worldwide component.

The movie contains numerous impressive shots of the antenna (billed as the "world's most beautiful radio telescope") in

various lighting conditions, including night and daybreak. Not surprisingly, the visitor's center currently has 100,000 visitors per year. The movie appears to be technically correct for the times, and even has old Nixie-tube readouts. At one critical point in the movie, the antenna couldn't be lowered sufficiently in elevation to acquire Apollo 11 as it sat on the moon, since the moon had just risen. The dish director orders the feed to be offset – at which point I could hear antenna engineers watching the movie yelling: "YES!!"

It's a shame this movie did not receive a wider audience. Both my wife and my twelve-year-old daughter gave it thumbs up. So did all of the reviews on Amazon.com, along with Ebert and Roeper. I highly recommend it to all viewers: "techies" and otherwise. It is rated PG-13 due to brief bad language (which could have been eliminated without subtracting from the movie).

If you have a home theater with an HDTV monitor, you are in for a real treat. This movie was recorded in wide-screen anamorphic format, with a 1.85:1 ratio. Since a 16:9 HDTV has a ratio of 1.78:1, there is an almost perfect screen fit, with none of those annoying bars apparent. The resultant video was of excellent quality. In addition, the sound was recorded in Dolby 5.1. The pop songs made excellent use of my rear speakers and sounded great. The launch of Apollo 11 shook my room, making ample use of the amplified subwoofer. I would give both audio and video five stars!

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