

COPING WITH AN INCOMPATIBLE BOSS

NINE LIVES CONSULTING 

Career Navigator



The single largest reason why employees leave an organisation is incompatibility with their boss or bosses. It is self-evident that there is a variety of unpalatable behaviours that trigger the departure, as every person has different triggers but the common theme is that the employee does not feel valued or respected for whom they are and what they do.

We all know that when accepting a new role, we must be sure we can work with the boss but most bosses are imposed on you after you have joined an organisation.

One person hires you then they are promoted, moved, resign or are sacked and suddenly you have a boss whom you don't know and didn't choose.

The supervisor's behaviour may not be universally unsuitable, it may be conscious and deliberately provocative, it may be unconscious, just being themselves without considering their impact on others. The supervisors' behaviour is dictated by their nature and nurture and if they are a long term employee, then it is very likely that workplace suits their style and admires their way of getting things done.

Some simplistic illustrations of mismatch are:

- You like order and clarity, the boss is chaotic
- You like to be able to check-in with the boss to ensure you are on the right track, your boss doesn't want to talk or when they do it is only to complain
- You want clarity and autonomy; tell me what needs to be done, leave me to do it... your boss wants to micro-manage you
- You want a boss who can give you clear decisions and instructions... your boss is a sycophant who cannot answer until they find out what their boss thinks, or is incompetent, or a game player (my knowledge is my power over you)
- You are adventurous and can cope with ambiguity, your boss is a stickler for the rules
- You like a collegiate environment, your boss is authoritarian
- You want to contribute ideas, your boss is not interested in what you have to say
- You like being a recognised team member with particular skills, your boss sees his team as his minions to do his bidding and make him look good



All these look and feel like you are unappreciated and not respected.

Any such situation is very stressful for both parties; when you are stressed you do not work at your most efficient nor your most effective, this sets you up for criticism and punishment.

When in an incompatible work situation, your natural tendency is to react in a way to rectify or cope with the situation, to protect your self-respect. Reactions can include; withdrawal, overly sensitive, disengaged, loss of confidence, anger, argumentative, sarcasm and provocative statements.

NONE OF THESE ARE HELPFUL.

As you cannot change the boss's personality and style, how do you cope with their unsuitable behaviour when the option to leave is not always the practical or easy path? Recognising the situation and not being ambushed by your own reactions enables you to take some control of the situation and not become the victim.

First and most important insight is: IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT AND YOU ARE NOT A FAILURE. You're just working with the wrong style of boss.

Secondly, what are you going to do about it?.

For longer term planning, what do you need to know?

We need to be individually well informed about ourselves. This entails clarity about:

- who we are and our most suitable work environment,
- what we enjoy and are good at,
- what we have to offer to prospective employers or clients.

If we are clear on these issues, we can select roles and work environments that suit us personally; our particular skills, interests and attributes.

This means we need clarity about:

- Our values: must match those demonstrated by the dominant party, (employer organisation, partners or clients). Without this match, one cannot maintain commitment and your best endeavours.
- The role.
 - Our track record indicates whether we can perform the role.
 - Our career stage and aspirations dictate the personal purpose of the role.
 - Our personality dictates the style and key focus of the role
- Our fit with the team; our personality and style cannot change significantly; we need to know what we need in our environment so that we can thrive. By knowing what we need, we can ensure we accept roles that suit us and hence we will be successful. For example, if you like working in an environment that has few surprises, then don't join an organisation that is poorly organised. If you like to work with a boss who respects you, don't get involved with a micro manager style of supervisor.

For more information or to chat, please don't hesitate to contact us.

The information provided in this article is of a general nature only and not intended to be advice

