

THIS IS THE BOOK BOSSES DON'T WANT YOU TO READ!

**WHO'S AFRAID OF THE
BIG, BAD BOSS?**



How to Survive 13 Types of
Dysfunctional, Disrespectful,
Dishonest Little Dictators

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BACKGROUND

Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Boss? 13 Types and How to Survive Them

By Marilyn Haight

"Making an honest statement involves daring to be different, unpopular, nonconformist."

Abraham H. Maslow; The Farther Reaches of Human Nature

THE SYSTEM WAS BROKEN

In the mid-1980s, I was working as the co-chairperson of a "Quality Improvement Team" in a large corporation. The team's goal was to solve problems with a newly offered service. Service due dates were routinely missed and quality was substandard when customers finally received it. The team included representatives from each of the departments that had a role in providing this service.

Our first task was to provide our management with an estimate of how long it would take to meet our goal. Following the guidance of the "Quality Consultant" assigned to work with our team, we estimated that it would take ten months.

When we presented our estimate to the big boss, he rejected it. He told us that ten months was too long and ordered us to calculate a new estimate. We reassembled our team of experts and started over as if we had not already done this task. We came up with the same answer: ten months. We presented this estimate to the big boss again. This time we supported our estimate with an explanation of the "Quality Improvement Process" that we had followed in determining it, and we explained all the reasons why it would take ten months. He rejected our estimate again and told us that we must complete the project in six months.

When we asked for a reason for the six-month deadline, the big boss told us that he needed to report the completion of this project in the current calendar year so he could be eligible for an annual bonus. It didn't matter to him that we wouldn't be able to solve customer-affecting problems; in fact, he wanted us to say that we had solved the problems.

That was a major turning point in my career. It etched a burning question in my mind: How is it possible for one manager to have the power to undermine the work of an entire organization for personal gain and get away with it? So I embarked on a quest to learn the answer.

I TRIED TO HELP FIX IT

I decided to transfer into the Management Development department. I thought I'd be in a position to intervene in situations similar to this one and prevent this kind of mismanagement. While working full time, I went back to school, earned a graduate degree in Organization Behavior and became an Organization Development (OD) consultant.

Working in the Management Development department, I did intervene in similar situations, but I still couldn't stop them. Managers had absolute control, and when it would become apparent that they were actually causing problems, they'd terminate the intervention. I could see what was happening, but I didn't understand how they were getting away with it. So, while I continued to work full time, I enrolled in a doctoral program in Human and Organization Development (HOD) which helped me understand the motives and incentives underlying individual and group behavior in organizations. This knowledge was invaluable to me in my work, and I began to think that I might be able to make a difference. But my knowledge only angered the people who hired me to help them, and now I had no doubt that they didn't really want to make improvements. I knew I had to do something else, and the opportunity soon arose.

During a downsizing event, I retired early and started my own business as an independent consultant. Among my clients were managers in small, mid-sized and large organizations. I continued to observe common patterns of management misbehavior in non-entrepreneurial organizations across different industries, as well as the negative effects misbehaving managers had on employees and their organizations' overall business results.

Over time, I recognized that the management style practiced in organizations is determined by the personality of the individual who controls the department, group or entire enterprise. It became apparent that changes to improve efficiency and effectiveness in organizations had to begin with changes in the behavior of the managers who controlled the organization and its units. If they weren't willing to change their behavior, the organization not only wouldn't improve, but it would get worse.

I GAVE UP

Eventually, I reached another turning point in my career. I realized that it is not possible to help organizations improve their operational effectiveness and efficiency when they are controlled by managers who cannot or will not behave in ways that support the organization's purpose and goals. I came to doubt the efficacy of my profession—Organization Development (OD).

After some soul-searching, I realized that I did not want to associate with people who put their personal gain above the goals of the organization that employs them. I closed my business.

I WAS LOST

I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life at that point. I thought about the employees who had come to me for help while I was consulting with their bad bosses, and I thought about the lack of resources available to help them. So, I created individual-development programs and, for a short while, I worked with managers one-on-one, on their own time and using their own money. But I became discouraged when I saw that they were unwilling to take the initiative to change their situation. So I stopped doing that, too.

My pension was too small to live on and my savings were running out, so I read all the career advice books I could get my hands on. They had a common theme: do what you love. I loved my work as an OD consultant, but I couldn't stand the incongruous behavior of the people I had to work with to do it, so that advice wasn't very helpful to me.

A victim of the Protestant work ethic, I couldn't tolerate being unproductive. So I thought about my work again. I broke it down into its parts to discover what I loved about it. One of the things I enjoyed most about OD was diagnosing a situation before recommending an intervention. That involved research and analysis. Suddenly, a light went on.

I BECAME AN UNDERCOVER RESEARCHER

I'm not sure exactly when it dawned on me—it seemed more to evolve—but the idea to work at jobs and secretly study the behavior of managers occurred along with the idea that I might be able to write a book that would help employees deal with seemingly impossible situations. The more I thought about it, the more doable it became; I had the skills to be employed, the skills to conduct research, *and* I would be getting paid to work in the organizations in which I conducted my study—*income problem solved!*

There was just one other problem: What if I found good bosses and exemplary leaders rather than bad bosses? Problem? Not really. I'd just quit my research and work with those managers happily ever after. That decision solved the problem of potential bias leaking into my study, bias that might have led me to focus only on the bad and overlook the good.

Over the next five years, from 1997 through 2002, I held eleven different positions at various levels and in various industries. I worked under the direction of managers who conducted their day-to-day business activities unaware that they were being observed. To obtain these positions, most of the time I responded to newspaper ads and online listings; occasionally I applied through a recruiter or a temporary agency. The duration of my employment in each organization ranged from six weeks to nine months. Although I was free to resign from these positions at any time, the pressure placed on me to conform to dysfunctional norms still had undesirable effects; there were times when I developed physiological symptoms of stress—just like employees who feel they have no other options.

I BECAME AN AUTHOR

I deeply regret that my project was never foiled. The one good thing that came out of my research is an employee survival manual written from an "insider" perspective: *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Boss? 13 Types and How to Survive Them*. I hope the information in this book will help employees at all levels contend with bosses who won't let their good work make a positive contribution to their organization.