

WHO'S AFRAID OF THE  
BIG, BAD BOSS?



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

MARILYN HAIGHT

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

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### THE TERRORIZER

*"Our [past-normal-retirement-age] director, [my boss's boss], who is the only member of the corporate management company at our building, is terrorizing most of the staff here. Everyone detests her—she is truly an evil person. She has threatened me with termination—so far I am still waiting...and waiting. She hired another person [into one of our departments]—this person doesn't know what they will be doing or where they will be sitting—and she wouldn't let the [manager] of that department interview or talk to this [new hire]—told the current [manager] it was irrelevant what she thought or needed.*

*"Over the years other staff members have either quit or gotten ill or died due to her terrorist tactics—she bullies people and sets them up to fail by giving them tasks and then coming back later and saying I never told you to do that or that's not what I wanted. She also changes people's job duties periodically just to keep it chaotic here, and doesn't like to put things in writing that she says. She pits the staff members against each other so they are always concentrating on what each other is doing and not their own job, and always complaining—the morale is so low you could play golf on it.*

*"Recently [one of our] managers was standing in my doorway, next to my boss' office and overheard him lying about something. Another department manager walked in there and confronted our boss and this director (who ALWAYS sits in there...and badmouths all the employees, usually with the door open) and my boss denied all if it (when [the other] director actually heard them) and so now both of them are out to fire [that] director (because they got BUSTED, you see, and they are tic'd because of that.*

*"I have additional written proof that she is out to get staff members, and LOTS of documentation with conversations, dates, and times. What she is doing is not illegal, but it is harassment even though it is not sexual. It is wrong and very, very bad and she is somehow still getting away with it.*

*"I have read all the material about working harder so your bad boss has no cause for complaints, and being happy because that annoys them, and documenting everything (which I am doing), but there must be SOME OTHER RECOURSE to make her stop. Are there any effective ways that will stop a bad boss/bad bosses from non-sexual harassment?"*

Dear Terrorized Employee,

Yes, there are deterrents, but they must be applied specifically, not generically. First, forget about all the superficial advice you've read elsewhere—it doesn't apply in your case; you're dealing with a demon. What your boss is doing is creating a "hostile workplace"—read more about it here: <http://www.eeoc.gov/types/harassment.html> It is a form of harassment, but while harassment is typically targeted toward an individual or demographic group, she is not targeting an individual or group, it's everyone, so you've got to break this problem down into chunks you can deal with.

The first thing you need to do is set a goal that is within your reach and realistic—that means take care of *you* first, not everyone else. Unless she reports directly to you, nothing you do can do will change the way this director deals with other people or the way she behaves when she thinks no one is listening or watching. Only *her* boss can do that, and apparently her boss could care less or s/he would be more involved. That leaves you to your own devices, and you *can* influence the way she interacts with you.

Communicate with her only in writing. When she doesn't respond in writing, write what she says back to her in a memo and ask if you've understood. Keep at it until she agrees with one of your written memos. She won't like it; too bad. Tell her you need notes to refer back to so you can be sure you are following her directions correctly when she's not around. Then, once it works for you, if your colleagues are strong (I suspect they're not because of the infighting) they can learn to take care of themselves. Taking care of yourself, however, is not going to make your office a better place to work because there will still be tension all around you.

About her threats of termination, because you work for a corporation, it is unlikely that you would be terminated at her whim. There are typically Human Resources procedures documented in a personnel manual for dealing with non-performing or poorly-performing employees. Find out what those procedures are in your company. Unless your director has started documenting your job behavior in a negative way, her threat is probably empty—and since you've said she doesn't like to put things in writing, there probably is no case built against you, so no need to worry about termination. Besides, it is your immediate boss's job to do this.

Also, find out if your company has a mandatory retirement age. It's possible that you may be able to wait her out—you might feel a sense of relief knowing she may be leaving soon.

Next, separate yourself from all office gossip about this person and all other complaints. Do not engage in the conversations at all, they will just make the situation feel even worse than it is. Avoiding the talk will reduce the negative impact—concentrate on your work and your customers. The others must deal with this situation in their own way. Misery likes company so, if you must respond to their comments, ask something like, "*What are you doing to defend/protect yourself?*" Stay focused on achieving positive results.

Keep all of your documentation in a safe place away from your work location and continue to record incidents. If there is someone in Human Resources you can trust, make an appointment to find out if they know what's going on. If so, share a copy of your notes and tell them you

want an intervention and that you must remain anonymous. Let them take it from there. If you're not sure you can trust someone in HR, don't go.

Now, determine the impact this workplace is having on your health and relationships. If you haven't had a physical examination recently, schedule one with your family doctor. If your personal relationships have become strained, consider getting counseling to help you figure out how to put this situation into perspective. No matter what, update your resume and begin a job search. You don't have to take another job, but it's always good to know what's available and you just might find something better out there that lures you away from this dysfunctional situation. Besides, it can boost your energy to find out that you could be appreciated more somewhere else.

Also, if you don't already have them, find interests outside of your work to concentrate on—pleasant things. This will give you less time to think about what goes on during the workday.

Most importantly, **don't take these suggestions out of context—they work together**, not alone—you need a coordinated effort of many changes in your behavior to deal effectively with this awful situation.

This is the best you can do with so little in your control. It sounds like it might be hardest for you to see bad things happening to others—you must let that go—you are not in a social club, you are at work, trading the application of your skills for compensation—keep that in perspective.

You can improve the impact of this situation on you.