# 7 Steps to Surviving a Bad Boss

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By [*Adrienne Burke*](http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/advisor/blogs/author/adrienne-burke/) | [*Profit Minded*](http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/advisor/blogs/profit-minded/) – Fri, Apr 5, 2013

When we defined the [5 traits of the worst bosses](http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/advisor/5-traits-of-bad-bosses-192202212.html) here last month, we hit a nerve. Among the more than 3,000 readers who commented, many said things like, “This describes my boss, but what can I do about it?” After all, as tempting as it is some days, it’s just not practical for most of us to up and quit when a boss is making us miserable.

For answers on how to handle a less-than-stellar supervisor, we went back to Michelle Benjamin, CEO and founder of [Benjamin Enterprises](http://benjaminenterprises.com/) and an expert in helping companies improve their management cultures. Benjamin’s spinoff [TalentReady](http://talentreadyusa.com/) grooms middle managers for leadership positions as they climb the ranks, so her forté is to help rising stars get beyond bad bosses, as well as to avoid becoming them.

Here are 7 steps to survival with a bad boss—some of them a bit of tough love for employees—derived from our conversation with Michelle Benjamin.

**1. Look in the mirror.** It might not be what you want to hear, but Benjamin suggests any employee facing bad management first do a reality check. “This topic brings me back to when I was an employee, not a boss,” Benjamin says. “In the past, when I saw a 'help-wanted' ad, I thought it meant that the company had an open position. But as a boss, I know the true meaning of that ad is that the boss needs help. There is a need for a job to get done. Money is exchanged for that help you are hired to bring,” she points out.

If you report to someone you consider a bad boss, your first task is to “ask yourself if you recognize why you were hired,” says Benjamin. “Look at your own weaknesses and what you might be doing to contribute to a bad situation.”

If indeed you are there to help the boss and the business, you recognize why you were hired, “and your intentions are pure,” Benjamin says, “then it’s about having the courage to ask for the time for a deep conversation with your boss. The solution lies within you to either take the steps to change the situation or to make the move to leave the environment.”

**2. Recognize that your boss is human.** “No one is perfect. Not you or your boss,” says Benjamin. “We all have strengths and weaknesses. Can you use your strengths to improve things?” Say, for instance, you are frustrated by a boss who doesn’t communicate her expectations. If you can recognize that behavior, not the boss, as the problem, then start requesting meetings with your boss to discuss the parameters of new projects. "Ask, 'Has this been done before? If it has, show me what success looks like, or what a bad result looks like',” Benjamin says. “Talk through the task so that you and your boss are on the same wavelength. That conversation not only lets you know what you need to do to succeed, but shows that you have intentions to help and lays the foundation for transparency.”

What if that boss won’t accept the meeting? Or what if he checks at his email or text messages every two minutes while you’re meeting? “Those things are disrespectful. Make sure you are communicating your intention and listening for the response from the boss to see if she is willing to align,” Benjamin advises. “If not, then this is not going to work out.”

**3. Remember that diverse teams solve problems best.** Just because someone has divergent views from yours doesn’t make her a bad boss or mean you can’t work together. Studies have shown that the more diverse a team, the more innovative solutions it can conceive. Says Benjamin: “You should have the freedom to bring up suggestions and explain your rationales, and see if you can come away with a compromise. But ultimately we’re talking about a conversation with the boss, and you need to say, ‘I’m here to help you. Here are my thoughts, but I defer to you.’”

**4. Ask for a private meeting.** A group meeting is not the place to bring up issues with your boss, nor the place to try to bring more transparency to an organization by broaching subjects that haven’t been broached before, Benjamin says. Ask your boss for a one-on-one closed-door meeting.

If you want to suggest greater transparency, for instance, ask about it behind closed doors. Benjamin suggests saying, “I noticed that certain things are not discussed in meetings. Why? I really feel it would be good for the team to know how much money has been lost on this project. Help me to understand why certain things can’t be mentioned in a meeting.”

**5. Rehearse at home.** Before confronting a boss about what’s bothering you, zero in on three top issues and practice how you will bring them up. “If you give more than three it becomes a boss bash,” Benjamin says. “There might be 10 issues, but pick your top three. Then go into that meeting, announce what your intentions are, convey that your heart is pure and that you’re there to help the business and the boss to achieve the best possible results.” Benjamin says it should take you no longer than five minutes to express yourself. “Then, be quiet and listen. The boss’s answers will either open a door for you to go deeper with that company, or they will show you that it is time to leave.”

**6. Establish trust.** Included in Benjamin's definition of “having pure intention” is that you don't join in water cooler complaint sessions, and you don’t spread or listen to office gossip. “In your private meetings with your boss, it would be fair for you to say, ‘what is heard here stays here.’” Breaking down barriers to build trust between the boss and employees will open the door for transparency, Benjamin says. “People don’t feel they can be transparent because they don’t trust a person. Building trust takes time.”

**7. Be willing to talk about blind spots.** “Our education systems don’t prepare people for management. Bosses are forced to learn on the job. If they’re really fortunate they have an exceptional leader they can emulate,” Benjamin says. “But more often than not it’s trial and error, and more error than the employee or manager would like.”

You and your boss have blind spots. "We don’t always see ourselves the way others are seeing us," Benjamin says. “Be willing to talk about it. I’ve seen it work. So much can be solved that way.” She compares it to gently pointing out to a friend that they use the phrase “you know” three times in every sentence. It’s a behavior they aren’t even aware of, but once it’s pointed out they can take notice and change. “Someone who can become a trusted employee will ask, ‘Can we have a meeting about this?’”