



Timely Information for Personal Success

Tips on Handling Tough Bosses

By Joel Peterson

Unless you see no end in sight or your supervisor is ruining your health or your career prospects, a bad boss may not be a reason to quit. Instead, consider your difficult boss a personal tutor designed to teach lessons a great boss never will.

Looking through this enlightened lens, here are some of the skills you can glean from a difficult boss:

❖ **Developing a positive attitude.** Careers consist of getting through ups and downs – including the occasional bad boss. “This, too, shall pass” should be your mantra during this challenging phase. You have a job to do. Jobs come and go – so will this boss. In one of my early jobs, I had a never-smiling, never-complimenting, ever-unpleasant boss – sullen, negative and critical at every moment.

Rather than let his attitude infect mine, I made it my goal to surprise and delight him to the point that he would simply crack a smile. He never did. But after three months of coming in early, sweeping up at the end of the day and surprising him with by going “above and beyond,” he did write me a glowing letter of recommendation.

❖ **Demanding high standards.** Another bad boss I worked with as a peer was great at frightening people into over-preparation. After seeing him threaten subordinates with their jobs if he didn’t get what he wanted, I still use his example to remind myself to avoid fear or intimidation as motivators.

That said, I also remember his intensity. Although I chose not to adopt his punishing techniques, he raised my standards by his demands, and I learned to set high expectations. It was my job to translate his expectations to others, and I learned to bring out the best in them by tapping into their desires not to disappoint.

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Healthy Recipe: Apple-Cranberry Oatmeal

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup water
- 1/2 cup oatmeal
- 3 tablespoons chopped, tart apple
- 3 tablespoons dried cranberries
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 266
- Protein: 7 g.
- Carbohydrates: 54 g.
- Sodium: 3 mg.
- Fat: 3 g.
- Fiber: 7 g.

DIRECTIONS:

- 1 Combine water and oatmeal in a small saucepan.
- 2 Add apples and cranberries and cook, stirring occasionally, over medium heat, for 7 minutes.
- 3 Spoon into a serving dish, sprinkle with the brown sugar. Serve warm.

Serving size: about 1 cup.

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Questions and Answers

'Dieting' isn't the Answer

Q: I've heard that so-called dieting isn't a good approach to losing weight. Is this true? If so, what would you recommend?

A: Dieting is fatalistic. It shifts control from *us* to someone else offering to direct the destiny of our health and weight with their particular contention or theory. The likelihood that any one of them is the "right" diet for any one of us, let alone for all of us, is rather remote.

The distraction of quick-fix diets kills the opportunity to leverage effective programming to influence a family, which is the fundamental unit of culture. When individuals try to change and their families don't come along for the ride, change is generally unsustainable. But when *families* change; eating better and exercising more, it is the entry-level expression of culture change – and *that* is something that lasts. In unity, there is strength. Dieting kills unity because we tend to diet alone. Moral of the story: Don't call it "dieting," call it "culture change," and be sure to make it a family affair.

Source: David L. Katz, MD, MPH.

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❖ **Learning how to motivate.** I recall another boss who thought it was his job to point out every flaw, to put everyone on his or her heels, and to strike fear in the team. I could not have had a better tutorial on how *not* to motivate, inspire or help others achieve their potential once I became a manager myself.

We learn from mistakes, bad experiences and failures. It's better to learn from the missteps of others (including a bad boss's management style) than from having to make every mistake ourselves. So if you have a difficult boss, study him. Figure out what makes him problematic. Resolve to do things differently if you ever get the chance. But don't miss the opportunity to see if you're reading things correctly. In other words, *you* may be the problem. Perhaps you're not getting it – not doing things to learn, grow and produce great work.

One notoriously tough boss, General George Patton, said: "*Never tell people **how** to do things. Tell them **what** to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.*" Rather than surviving a difficult boss, you may be simply criticizing "your Patton" when you could have been learning a lesson about relying on your own ingenuity.

Summary

Ultimately, there is no better teacher than adversity, and a really bad boss can excel at providing it. Studying hard under such a tutor will prepare you for future opportunities. At the very least, it will help increase the odds that you won't become a terrible boss yourself. ■

Joel Peterson is the chairman of JetBlue Airways.