

"I hate my boss!"

While pop culture like Dilbert comics and The Office sitcom lampoon bad managers, in reality, bosses from hell are no laughing matter

Many corporate horror stories often begin and end with bosses from hell.

Sharing experiences of working with bad boss is almost like a rite of passage in the corporate world - at least once in your life you would have worked with such a boss. Lunch time becomes a sacred pow-wow of disgruntled employees to air their work-related grievances - bosses included.

Bitching about the bad boss may enhance camaraderie among employees, but HR should recognise that such behaviour can quickly become toxic and can endanger employee engagement and productivity.

Is your boss bad - really, really bad?

Bad bosses do exist, but such behaviour may not necessarily be a personality flaw. To be fair, there are managers who are simply unaware they are terrible. A lack of training for these managers is a large possibility for such behaviour.

In Robert Sutton's book, *The No Asshole Rule*, he defines a bad boss as someone who leaves a subordinate or another co-worker demeaned and de-energised through actions such as yelling or screaming. Not all bad bosses subscribe to such overt actions while bullying their staff. Passive aggressive behaviour, such as mocking and teasing, excluding staff from important meetings, two-faced deeds and sarcastic emails are just as damaging to a person's self-esteem.

But before concluding that a manager is the Devil's incarnate, engage in a candid self-assessment. Most bosses would not choose to discriminate without cause, but if you have been continually underperforming or have a lousy attitude towards work, your manager might have reason to be - but by no means condoned - mean.

Oh, behave!

Everyone has a right to a professional environment at the workplace. And as bad boss behaviour disrupts the workplace harmony, lowers morale and affects productivity, it is imperative that such behaviour be addressed as soon as possible.

Giving feedback to the badly behaved superior should be one of the first things employees should do, especially if the manager is unaware of his behaviour. It is important to clearly and objectively inform him how his actions and words affect you and your performance. If his behaviour affects everyone in the team, have everyone to meet with the boss together on the matter.

What should be discussed is how each party can work together to contribute to the team's goals and objectives. Most unwitting bad managers are open to discussion and

compromise. However, if it ends in an impasse, appealing to the bad boss' superior or HR might be necessary.

To stay or to go

Many people love their jobs and enjoy working with their colleagues. However, having to work with a unbearable boss compels them to think twice about staying in the company - even if there are no other push factors for them to leave.

According to a Work, Lipids and Fibrinogen study of more than 3,200 employees, a year of working under a manager with poor leadership skills increased men's risk of cardiac death or heart disease death by 25%.

This means that if a bad boss is giving you stress, requesting for a transfer or even leaving the organisation is necessary to preserve your health and sanity.

But if you have decided to stay, the first step in managing a bad boss is acceptance - acknowledge his shortcomings and resign to the fact there is a very big possibility he would not change. This would help you manage his expectations as well as your own.

The next is for self-preservation purposes - keep a journal of incidents, documenting them as objectively as possible.

And mostly importantly, remain professional at all times.

HR takeaways

While HR is not the go-to place for every altercation and disagreement, an employee's complaint against a manager should be looked into. And at the beginning, HR should work together with managers to cultivate a work environment where employees are able to raise work-related issues or problems without fear of censure or retaliation. Leaving the organisation should be a last resort.

Such efforts demonstrate the organisation's commitment to providing a conducive and professional workplace, surely a boost to their retention strategies.

As the corporate adage goes, people join good companies but leave bad bosses.