

# This species of difficult boss apparently isn't extinct

## There are coping tactics to deal with an autocrat

By Rick Conlow

### *Q. How do you cope with an autocratic boss?*

A. Some people think the autocratic boss is a dinosaur but, in light of your question, it's obvious they're not an extinct species.

I sense behind your question some negative emotions – frustration, irritation, anger. That's to be expected. Autocratic bosses can be tough to work for because they usually lack people skills. They don't communicate, build teamwork, listen, create win/win situations, or establish cooperation. Autocratic bosses can be overbearing, pushy, abusive, critical and unappreciative. Does any of this describe your boss?

Autocratic managers do have their good points. They're often technically competent. They manifest great personal confidence and they're willing to work very hard. But these good qualities are small comfort why you're dealing day to day with all those other unattractive characteristics.

You have two choices when working with an autocratic boss. Because few of them will significantly change their approach, you can quit or you can decide to make the best of it. The suggestions that follow are some coping strategies if you choose to continue to work for the autocratic manager.

- Be assertive on issues that are important to you, no on the trivial items. You'll gain respect.

- Avoid arguing and becoming defensive. Autocratic bosses not only hate to lose, they won't lose. And they will treat you even worse if you make them look bad.
- Acknowledge the autocratic manager's viewpoints – even though you may not agree with them – by paraphrasing his or her ideas before you state your point.
- Activate constructive confrontation if you're pushed to far. Do this by stating the problem, expressing how you feel and what you prefer to have happen. Use this approach strategically and always be well prepared.

### WHERE'S THE BOSS?

### *Q. How do I know if I'm a manager?*

A. The obvious answer to this question is: when you get the job and title. But let's look beyond the obvious, as this is a sincere question and shouldn't be taken lightly. A job title doesn't automatically confer ability. Managers receive respect and support and that must be earned.

To determine if you're a manager yet, ask yourself some questions. Are my employees following my lead? Am I getting long-lasting results from them?

Employees can tell if someone is a genuine manager based on their experiences with that person. Consider the following experience. An employee in a mid-size Twin Cities company explained how he reacted to his particular situation:

“My manager laid off me and others and then rehired us at a lower hourly rate. When we came back to work, the manager was demanding, rude and oblivious to our situation. I got back at him because I

worked only when he was around and that wasn't often.”

Was this person's manager actually managing or was he simply the person who had the title?

Contrast that employee's experiences with those of some other local managers who have demonstrated skills that make their employees willing to put forth special effort in their companies. After his employees had worked hard on a special project, one manager took them all off the job one day for a tour of the Minnesota Zoo. Another manager gets involved in important personal situations such as helping her employees find down payments on their first homes.

It may seem that the first “manager” is

managing in his own way, but if he's not getting his employees to produce results, he isn't managing – he's bullying. Actually becoming a manager is a process, not the passive act of simply receiving a position.

Also keep in mind that managers are not only sensitive to the needs of their employees, but they're also sensitive to the goals of the organization. A local manager, for example, recently had to fire his best friend. It was a tough thing to do, but the employee's poor performance was negatively affecting the organization.

Here's what it all boils down to: You'll know you're a manager when your people respect you even when they may not agree with some of your decisions.

### About WCW Partners

Rick Conlow, CEO/Senior Partner, and Doug Watsabaugh, COO/Senior Partner have helped companies, governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations achieve record-breaking results for more than 20 years as performance improvement experts. Their clients' achievements include double digit improvements in repeat and referral business, triple digit increases in sales, more than 50% reduction in customer complaints, 34 quality and service awards and domination in their respective markets. Rick and Doug are popular motivators and speakers, inspiring audiences with their engaging down-to-earth but down-to-business approach. They have authored more than a dozen books, including *SuperSTAR Customer Service*. This year they will publish the *SuperSTAR Leadership Model*.

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