



Book Managing Your Manager

How to Get Ahead with Any Type of Boss

Gonzague Dufour
McGraw-Hill, 2010

Recommendation

A stressed-out manager often results in stressed-out employees. You can have a more positive, productive professional life if you understand your supervisors and handle them according to their personality profiles. Human resources executive Gonzague Dufour identifies and explains the six common managerial types. He devotes most chapters to profiling these archetypes, listing identifying traits according to professional tactics that work or don’t work for each manager in specific situations, such as asking for a raise or dealing with a crisis. While many managers manifest characteristics from more than one boss type, and not all leaders are so easy to categorize, you will find yourself nodding in agreement with many of the author’s points. *BooksInShort* recommends this practical, useful book to entry- and mid-level employees, as well as to higher-level executives who wonder, “Am I a good boss?”

Take-Aways

- No manager is perfect, so learn what works and doesn’t work for your boss.
- Work effectively with your manager by identifying and understanding his or her type:
- “Bullies” are tough and aggressive; they take unnecessary risks but deliver results.
- “Good” bosses remain calm and consistent. They don’t take risks, and they can’t deal with conflict.
- “Kaleidoscopes” shift their personality traits to gain power and are hard to understand.
- “Stars” are high-energy and dramatic. They have little patience for procedures.
- “Scientists” are logical and like to apply theories, but they are poor communicators.
- “Navels” have big egos and can distract people from their goals.
- “Seventh Leaders” are ideal bosses. They are capable of both leading and following their staff members.
- Authentic Seventh Leaders are a rare species, but you can help your boss acquire Seventh Leader characteristics.

Summary

What Kind of Manager Is Your Boss?

Employees who understand and work well with their supervisors flourish in their jobs. Look for your boss among six common managerial types:

- “The Bully.”
- “The Good.”
- “The Kaleidoscope.”
- “The Star.”
- “The Scientist.”
- “The Navel.”

“Great bosses are learners. They look to learn from everything – the Internet, books, training courses, observing others and their own people.”

If you're lucky, your boss is a rare "Seventh Leader," who can adapt and learn from others. Each boss type has positive and negative attributes you can learn to manage.

The Bully

As the name suggests, Bully bosses are competitive, aggressive, driven and confident. Bullies motivate their employees with fear and intimidation. They aren't afraid to question or criticize others, including their own bosses. Bullies micromanage. Many people like working for Bullies because they reward ambitious people who deliver results.

"Bullies [are] skilled at knowing where an employee's most vulnerable spot [is] and hitting it with a barbed comment."

Never take a Bully's comments personally. Instead, find humor in situations; "limit the pain, target the gain." Set a time limit on how long you will work for a Bully. To handle Bullies, avoid surprises and keep them "in the loop." Develop an area of expertise they lack, do the jobs they hate and stand up to them.

"If you're ambitious, if you like to be in the middle of the action, if you love testing new and innovative ideas – then you may bridle under the Good's firm grip."

When dealing with a Bully, remain calm. Be adaptable. Learn to be subtle. If a Bully confronts you, turn the tables by asking rhetorical questions or suggesting alternative solutions. Regularly change the technique you use when you respond so Bullies can't categorize you.

The Good

Good managers are competent at their jobs. They're reasonable, efficient, stable and predictable. Good managers believe in moderation and remain patient in stressful situations. They don't think outside the box or take risks, and they avoid confrontation. Good managers ignore office politics and are poor networkers. Manage Good bosses by doing their dirty work and taking the risks they avoid.

"People who do best working for Navels tend to have their antenna up; they are always conscious of their boss's egos and how that will impact their actions."

Good bosses do not respond well to games, and they don't like unpredictable, inconsistent or phony people. Be the indispensable worker Good managers can count on, and they will keep you in mind for promotion.

The Kaleidoscope

Kaleidoscopes are difficult to understand because their personalities shift in different situations. A Kaleidoscope may be sweet and sensitive to customers, direct and challenging to employees, indifferent to co-workers, or any combination of these.

"When you have a powercentric boss, the last thing you want is to communicate that you don't respect or heed his authority."

Kaleidoscope managers "possess self-confidence bordering on arrogance." They manipulate people to gain power, and they expect others to do the same. They are intelligent and have reasons for their actions, but they will never share their justifications with you.

Despite these foibles, you can still manage the Kaleidoscope chameleon. Accept that you will never see the "real Kaleidoscope" behind the mask, and display your power selectively. Ask Kaleidoscope managers what they want to achieve in the next year or two. Although they won't tell you directly, you may glean insight into their priorities. Keep your Kaleidoscope informed, but filter your communications, and give Kaleidoscope managers only the information they want to know.

"Star managers...possess a certain hubris [and] believe in their ideas absolutely. Point out the flaws in their reasoning or warn them about negative outcomes...and you'll alienate Stars."

Recognize what actions to avoid to remain in your Kaleidoscope manager's good graces. Don't emulate their behavior or "play this boss." Don't believe the hype. Kaleidoscopes will say what you want to hear to get what they need to have. And don't forget that Kaleidoscopes have a hidden agenda. Kaleidoscopes can be serious and challenging. Figure out their sense of humor and indulge it. Make your Kaleidoscope laugh.

The Star

Stars are dramatic and exciting; they love to be in the spotlight. A Star supervisor may throw objects when angry or shell out gifts when pleased. Stars are not subtle or discreet. They hate anything that delays action: meetings, bureaucracy, presentations, slow computers, and so on. Stars are full of energy, and they "don't miss many opportunities to put on a show."

"The Kaleidoscope...is myopic about power, and it's wise never to forget this fact."

Working with a Star means dealing with extreme highs and lows, so "enjoy the ride." Stars expect more from their employees than other boss types. They might expect you to work evenings and weekends, for example. You may disappoint a Star, but savor the joy Stars bring to work.

Learn to steer rather than control this type of boss. Also, remember that Stars like their information straight and to the point.

"The Star wants his information quick and neat. Long or unclear explanations will irritate him to no end."

Stars need an audience, so be a good listener. Ask them for help when you need it. Stars do not like disloyal staff members or naysayers, and they are intolerant of

those who talk back. They appreciate “good soldiers” who carry out orders without asking questions. If you are a team player and you don’t need to be front and center, you may be a good fit for a Star.

The Scientist

Scientists are eager to test theories and put them into practice, and they love talking about the latest business notions and management practices. Scientists justify their actions by their belief in a theory or system. They can be pedantic, and they are happy to explain how their pet ideas apply to a situation.

“The Scientist...has a keen mind and a tremendous grasp of theory and practice.”

Scientists are good at giving and receiving feedback. They stick to the facts and leave emotions out of their analyses. Scientists, like absent-minded professors, are easily distracted and disorganized. Scientists can become sidetracked by tangents and may cancel meetings altogether. More so than other boss types, scientists are easygoing. They are amiable and get along well with their colleagues.

“Our group faced a crisis about which the Bully knew very little, yet he took it on with great confidence and handled it with great effectiveness. Confidence to the point of arrogance has its benefits.”

You can work effectively with a Scientist if you enjoy intellectual challenges and can “translate” their theories for others who don’t understand them. You must also find a balance of loyalty to your Scientist supervisor and to the organization as a whole. While the Scientist may have a trusted circle of supporters within your company, you also need to cultivate relationships outside that circle. Become a Scientist’s bridge to the outsiders, and establish a reputation for working well with others.

“Understanding how your particular boss will respond to a crisis gives you an advantage in helping him work through it.”

Scientists respect reason and logic and won’t tolerate anger or sadness. Scientists will back you as long as you support their management theories and don’t get in the way.

The Navel

The Navel is the most difficult type of boss. Navels, as in “navel gazer” (a metaphor for being so self-absorbed you just stare at your belly button) have outsized egos. Navels are excellent salespeople and are most adept at selling themselves. Many Navels believe in themselves so strongly that they regularly convince others to overlook their mistakes. Navels are ruthless, decisive and action-oriented. They make decisions quickly without consulting others, and they don’t want to hear your suggestions.

“Passively accepting an unacceptable situation or tolerating a boss who isn’t doing a lot for you strikes me as unnecessary.”

At some point in your career, you will deal with a Navel. You can’t do anything about your Navel’s ego, so find an appropriate outlet for venting. Confide in someone you trust. Build an alliance with a different manager, because the Navel has no interest in advancing your career. Recognize, however, that the Navel knows how to get things done.

You can manage a Navel. For example, tell your Navel boss that it’s your fault – even if it isn’t – that a project didn’t go as you had planned. Navels will respond to flattery only if it’s used sparingly. Discover what your Navel boss does well, and make sure that he or she has the opportunity to show off that skill.

When working with a Navel, keep your guard up. Navels are sensitive to slights. They have a “limited shelf life” and eventually will fail. Although their ability to achieve results will keep them afloat temporarily, organizations that value teamwork, staff development and transparency won’t keep Navels around for long.

Situational Management

Each manager type reacts differently to various situations, including managing during a crisis. In an emergency situation, Good managers move too slowly because they want to distribute responsibility equally. Help them by taking action. Bullies, are better equipped to deal with crises because they have no fear of challenging situations. Support your Bully manager by becoming a team player. A Kaleidoscope may sacrifice you in times of stress, so make sure you have networked with others. Keep Kaleidoscope managers informed. If they maintain power, you will, too. Stars live for crises because they love the spotlight. Follow your Star’s lead and be a good listener. When a crisis conflicts with a Scientist’s practices, take advantage of the Scientist’s willingness to receive feedback, and steer him or her in the right direction. Because Navels are most concerned about themselves, you should protect yourself first. Gather evidence that proves you did not contribute to the crisis.

At some point, you will want recognition for all your hard work, and you will seek a promotion. Bullies prefer to promote people on their own timetable. Use indirect tactics, such as starting a rumor that another company is interested in you, to alert them to your potential. Your Bully won’t want to lose you to a competitor. Because Goods fear risk, your promotion will upset their status quo. Enlist support from other team members and make your case. Kaleidoscopes only promote based on business needs and maintaining their power base. Bide your time with Kaleidoscopes, and make sure your promotion gets them something they need. Stars reward other Stars. If you want a promotion from a Star, do something that grabs his or her attention and highlights your own Star qualities. Scientists reward expertise. Invest time and effort in workshops or seminars, taking classes, and broadening your work experience. Navels will ask, “What’s in it for me?” Convince Navels that your promotion will cement their reputation for developing talent, and that it will create powerful alliances within the company.

The Seventh Leader

Great bosses encourage learning and growth, and they listen and respect their employees. Seventh Leaders adapt without an agenda and learn from their teams. Seventh Leaders can receive feedback, listen carefully to what they’re told, analyze objectively and integrate feedback into their own managerial style.

Help other bosses acquire Seventh Leader traits:

- Bullies like to be in charge, but casually mention team members’ areas of expertise.
- Goods are reluctant to move beyond their comfort zone. Encourage more risk taking by showing your Good examples that worked for other companies.
- Kaleidoscopes are the most likely Seventh Leaders. Nudge them forward by alleviating their fear and paranoia over any possible loss of power. Show them how flexibility and teamwork increase their power in the long run.
- Encourage Stars to share the spotlight with others.
- Scientists cling to their theories. Therefore, suggest a related theory that can help open the Scientist’s eyes.
- Navels can become Seventh Leaders, but they have the “furthest distance to travel.” Over time, you can earn your Navel’s trust. Once a Navel confides in you, suggest ways for him or her to improve.

Only you can assess your supervisor’s potential to become a Seventh Leader. Although you can’t change your supervisor, you can help any type of boss improve, and that will help you in the long run.

About the Author

Gonzague Dufour has been an HR executive with major companies worldwide.
