

45 Things You Do
That Drive Your Boss
Crazy*

*And How to Avoid Them



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Anita Bruzzese
Perigee, 2007
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Recommendation

The coal mine canary was a low-tech but effective early warning device that miners used to detect dangerous poison gases in the mineshafts. Anita Bruzzese performs a similar warning function for the modern workplace. Since 1992, she has written about its various ills, as well as reporting on general workplace topics in her popular, insightful weekly column “On the Job.” To develop her book, Bruzzese culled through hundreds of letters she received from workers asking for advice about problems they encounter at work (many of which they create themselves). Bruzzese is a leading authority on all things office-related. *BooksInShort* suggests that she can teach you a lot about what constitutes acceptable – and not so acceptable – workplace behavior. This book is ideal for any employee who wants to know what mistakes to avoid in order to stay in the boss’s good graces and to get ahead at work.

Take-Aways

- You are important to your organization and to your boss.
- However, your bad behavior in the workplace can scoot you right out the office door.
- Your boss can be your best friend or your worst enemy.
- Control your emotions at work.
- Treat your co-workers with dignity and respect.
- Communicate with them in a professional manner.
- Always dress and act appropriately at the office.
- Eliminate bad work habits and attitudes before they eliminate you.
- In the office, or on the road, never waste your time.
- Give your all to the company.

Summary

No One Is Irreplaceable

Within your organization, you are a precious asset. Your organization spent valuable resources to train you in its procedures, and to familiarize you with its various programs and activities. But do not think that you are irreplaceable. No employee is. You must always perform at your optimum level at work, and refrain from letting your personal behavior, attitudes or actions compromise your job security, or your chances for better pay and job advancement.

“Bosses dislike having to deal with employees who behave as if they’re still second graders on the school playground.”

To these ends, work hard to please your boss. When they are on your side, you can move up the ladder quickly. When they are not, the only place you will move is out the door.

Here are 45 mistakes that would make any boss see red:

1. **“Treating the office like it’s your love shack”** – Bonding with your co-workers is natural. However, avoid doing so in a romantic or sexual way. Forego office affairs. They complicate things and kill careers.
2. **“Punching the soda machine when you’re stressed out and ticked off”** – To deflate stress, take desk breaks, eat lunch out and reconcile your personal issues.
3. **“Goofing off on a business trip”** – Employees should handle themselves on the road as they do when they are in the office. Refrain from dressing sloppily, leaving files or laptops lying around, flirting with clients or spending hours and hours at tourist attractions.
4. **“Earning a reputation as a whiner, drama queen or general pain in the neck”** – You have only one reputation. Don’t ruin it at work by “dissing” your co-workers or making them loathe your company. Avoid constant complaining, attention seeking, making selfish choices and unloading problems on your colleagues.
5. **“Discussing your personal beliefs at work”** – You no longer live in medieval times. No one will burn you at the stake for your beliefs. Still, don’t try to shove your personal values and attitudes down the throats of your co-workers.
6. **“Telling dirty jokes and cussing on the job”** – Telling off-color stories or cursing a blue streak in front of colleagues is grossly inappropriate. It also is incredibly stupid. To batten down any sailor talk in your office, get yourself a swear jar, set yourself a fine and pay it.
7. **“Having questionable personal integrity”** – Do you lie or steal at work? Are you undependable? Do you always try to shift blame to others? Do you abuse your sick-day privileges? If so, do you really think people don’t notice? You better wake up and smell the coffee.
8. **“Blogging about your job”** – Some eight million blogs now exist on the Internet. If you are an online venter, what is the chance that your boss will read your negative rantings about him or her, or the company? Is it really worth finding out? Don’t use your personal blog to put down your manager, co-workers or organization.
9. **“Having poor writing and spelling skills”** – Research indicates that one out of three employees have poor composition skills. Since business involves a lot of report writing and similar communication, your boss is not going to like having to correct your grammar, spelling and composition routinely. To become a better writer, read more, practice word games, double check names and keep things simple.
10. **“Failing to write thank-you notes”** – Send thank-you notes to people who do you favors and send you gifts. Failure to do so is rude. Even if the present is less than great, show your appreciation: “Thank you for the bag of buffalo entrails. What an interesting and unique holiday gift. I appreciate you thinking of me.”
11. **“Committing e-mail blunders”** – Because e-mail is so efficient, making quick mistakes is easy, but these errors can haunt you, or even your heirs, for decades to come. After all, e-mails can last forever. When you compose one, be as circumspect as a lawyer. If you aren’t, you may need to hire one.
12. **“Failing to speak intelligently”** – How you present yourself relates directly to how well – or how poorly – you will do at work. Therefore, learn to speak in an intelligent, forthright manner. You cannot get your ticket punched for job advancement if you are unable to speak intelligently to others in the office.
13. **“Wearing the wrong thing to work”** – Some employees think that with the advent of “casual Fridays,” they can wear whatever they want that day, and even dress down during the week. Wrong. Your boss is held to account regarding how you and your co-workers perform, act and dress. So look sharp at work.
14. **“Behaving immaturely at company parties”** – Companies do not abandon their standards of conduct at office parties. Any employee who thinks so is naïve. The rules still apply, even when the liquor flows. If you take the sensible approach and decide not to drink alcohol, but don’t want to field questions about it, opt for tonic water with a lime slice. In general, keep the lampshades off your head and act like you are still at work. You are.
15. **“Being disorganized”** – Want to get ahead at work? Make people think that you are on top of things. You will create the opposite impression if your office is cluttered and disorganized. Research indicates that employees who are neat and keep their offices tidy receive promotions more readily than those who are not.
16. **“Being a poor listener”** – Most people speak at a rate of 125-150 words per minute, but they listen at a rate of 400-500 words per minute. When it comes to being attentive to others, this “listening gap” can pose a problem: The mind disengages too easily. Make sure you don’t “tune out” others at work, particularly your boss. Be smart. Listen and learn.
17. **“Losing sleep”** – You need restful sleep to function properly. Get it. To recharge your batteries after a poor night’s sleep, try power naps or breaks that are quiet, peaceful or restful.
18. **“Using your personal cell phone too much”** – Guess what? Work is a place for one thing: work. The most obvious clue that you are not working while at the office is when you jabber away on your personal cell phone. You wouldn’t spend your workday practicing your golf swing, so don’t spend it chatting with friends.
19. **“Acting like a boor at business meals”** – Do you belch loudly during business lunches? Do you eat like you haven’t had any food for weeks? You know you’re in trouble when your boss suggests that you attend an etiquette class. Watch your manners during business meals and at all other times, as well.
20. **“Not appreciating co-workers”** – Do you have a “Mom” at work? Someone upon whom everyone in the office depends to keep things running smoothly? How about a “Mr. Wizard” who can fix any technical problem. You will find these stock characters at most offices. Treat them and your other co-workers well at all times. You never know when you will need them. Plus, it is the right thing to do.
21. **“Failing to delegate”** – As much as you might want to, you can’t do everything yourself. Try to do so and you are bound to fail. This will be a big problem for you and for your boss. Learn to delegate.
22. **“Being intolerant”** – Discrimination in and out of the workplace is clearly wrong. With all of the antidiscrimination laws now in effect, it is also stupid. Everyone has the right to work, regardless of his or her race, gender, sexual orientation or similar factors. If you are biased, it’s well past time to change.
23. **“Disrespecting a mentor”** – Mentors are there to assist you and to make your job easier. They can show you the ropes and teach you how to work more efficiently. In an office environment, mentors are like gold. Treat them that way.
24. **“Not getting to know others in the company”** – Your boss’s reputation depends on his or her direct reports and the type of people that they are. If they are reclusive, even antisocial, this reflects poorly on the boss. Work is a social environment. Therefore, make it your business to meet your co-workers, including those in other departments. This will make you – and your boss – look good.
25. **“Giving feedback that is deliberately hurtful”** – Results from a recent survey indicate that incivility is a major problem in the modern workplace. Nearly half of respondents report that they have thought about quitting their jobs because of calculated rudeness. Twelve percent of the 775 individuals surveyed did leave their jobs for this reason. Finding and retaining good employees is not an easy task. Your boss will not appreciate it if it is your disparaging comments that push your co-workers out of the company.

26. **“Fostering an offensive workspace”** – Does your individual office space have a rank odor due to sweaty workout garb stored under your desk? Does annoying, loud music emanate from it all day long? Do you display inappropriate photos or posters? Your office is not your recreation room. It is company property.
27. **“Gossiping”** – You cannot be a productive employee if you spend half the day gossiping at work. Plus, gossip can be highly destructive, particularly in the close confines of an office. Don’t do it.
28. **“Not giving – or accepting – an apology”** – Did you make a mistake or hurt someone’s feelings at work? Saying that you are sorry for something you did or didn’t do does not diminish you. Often, it has the opposite effect. It makes you more human. So does gracefully accepting someone else’s apology.
29. **“Crying at work”** – Registering honest emotion at work is healthy. But being overly emotional and crying is a problem. You cannot get ahead at work if people see you as a crybaby. Learn how to express your emotions differently.
30. **“Caving in to a bully”** – Unfortunately, the work environment is often like the school playground. In both places, bullies abound. Unfortunately, bullying affects 16% of workers. Work is tough enough without bullies pushing you around every day. So stand up to them.
31. **“Failing to learn from mistakes”** – Everyone makes mistakes. However, smart people don’t make the same mistakes over and over. If you make a mistake, don’t react too gravely. Admit to it, investigate it and learn from it.
32. **“Being unable to overcome obstacles”** – Employees on the fast track accomplish their objectives regardless of whatever difficult barriers they encounter. Make this your style. Fight hard for what you want. Don’t be a quitter. You will never get ahead in life that way.
33. **“Having too much – or too little – confidence”** – Are you arrogant and haughty at work? Or submissive and meek? Find a healthy middle ground. This will work well for you – and for those around you.
34. **“Neglecting to write things down”** – Your boss doesn’t want to repeat things over and over. Write down everything that is important at work.
35. **“Asking for a raise you don’t deserve”** – Many companies do not provide annual raises. If this is the case at your firm, your salary depends on the contributions you make, not on your time in grade. Earn what you get.
36. **“Lacking knowledge of current events”** – Businesses cannot stay competitive and on the cutting edge if their employees are backward and out of touch. Keeping current is a vital work requirement for all employees.
37. **“Holding grudges”** – Your boss wants you and your colleagues to work cooperatively as a team. This is impossible if you are spiteful toward a co-worker over some old slight or similar problem. Get rid of the grudges.
38. **“Giving lackluster speeches or presentations”** – Do you get nervous when you make a presentation at work? If you do, your boss does, too. Fortunately, you can learn to eliminate your nervousness and speak with conviction. Do so.
39. **“Squandering time at seminars”** – Your company is making a major investment when it pays to send you out of town to attend a seminar or convention. Respect that investment. Pay attention and make sure your company gets its money’s worth from your involvement.
40. **“Skipping company-sponsored events”** – Don’t do it. It’s a direct insult to your employer when you fail to attend a company event.
41. **“Ignoring the company’s goals”** – If the company doesn’t achieve its goals and make money, eventually it will not have enough to pay your salary. Make the firm’s goals your goals.
42. **“Dodging meetings”** – Company meetings are often dull. However, you can learn a lot from them, not only about the organization’s activities, but also about its internal politics. Plus, you get a chance to impress others – and thus your boss.
43. **“Not going beyond your job descriptions”** – Your company operates in a tough, competitive business world. Your firm needs everything you have to offer. Bring all of your capabilities to bear on behalf of your organization.
44. **“Neglecting new co-workers”** – Don’t haze new employees, help them.
45. **“Fighting change”** – The more flexible and adaptable you are, the more valuable you will be to your employer.

About the Author

Anita Bruzese writes the “On the Job” column, which has eight million weekly readers. It is published by the Gannett News Service and appears in *USA Today*.
