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Work Force

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Learn to Finesse a Bad Boss

Bad bosses are usually characterized as larger-than-life tyrants or fools. Just look at Mr. Burns from "The Simpsons," the pointy headed boss from the comic strip "Dilbert," or the head honcho from the cult classic flick "The Office." But it's no fun when these characters mimic your own office life. A boss who belittles or screams at you or lacks communication skills can cause stress, illness and sleepless nights, and prevent you from enjoying your job.

A boss may be a monster for different reasons. Maybe he or she is insecure about his job status in this era of restructuring and downsizing. Perhaps they are having trouble at home or with personal finances. Or it could be that they are just not a nice person.

The cause of the behavior isn't your problem. What is your problem is how you handle it. Here are some ideas to help you take control of the situation so you can make your life more pleasant and your workday more bearable.

Problem: "My boss often gives me feedback -- but it's all negative."

Solution: Don't just accept the negativity: Ask for an appointment to discuss how you can improve your job performance. At the meeting, act like a professional, accepting his views without being defensive. Each time you get a new assignment, think about how you will approach it and confirm it with your boss.

Problem: "My boss screams at me in front of others."

Solution: If your boss treats you like a 3-year-old, don't "egg" him on. The best response is, "Thank you. I understand." If he screams at you in the middle of a packed-house meeting about not making a deadline, keep your voice and delivery low. That way, he will feel like a child and you will come off as the adult. If this strategy doesn't work, set up an appointment with your boss. Ask him if he can speak to you about certain matters privately instead of publicly. Document descriptions of these meetings. That way, you can have a paper trail if you need to take your complaint to your boss' boss or human resources.

Problem: "My boss is completely unrealistic with his expectations."

Solution: Make a list of your workload one week. List what you are doing and how long it takes to get it done. Then take this list to your boss and ask for suggestions on how you can get it all done on time. You may get more recognition for your efforts or even a raise once your boss understands how much you're doing.

Problem: "My boss has no idea what he is doing in his role."

Solution: Since your boss isn't on top of things, stay on top of your boss. Ask him if there's anything else you can be doing on the job. Give an in-person or e-mail summary of what you've gotten done every few days or after you've finished a major project. While there's not much else you can do, at least you can try to do things his way.

If these tactics don't work or you feel your boss' behavior is unacceptable, don't just sit there. Report your boss' antics to his supervisor or to someone in human resources. If you don't want to be a troublemaker or whiner, ask for a transfer or see if you can make an internal move to another department.

If you can't do that, consider searching for a new job. Try not to quit before you find a new one. But if the situation is ruining your life, you might need to leave. A job shouldn't be detrimental to your health or your sanity.

Discover The Right Way to Leave a Job

While the current economy has instilled a greater sense of appreciation in those who have managed to keep their jobs, there are still some workers out there who are choosing to leave their positions. Whether you resign or are let go, leaving a job can be an emotional experience. You may be bitter about leaving, or maybe you are thrilled. Regardless of your emotional state, it's important to leave with dignity and grace. You don't want to make enemies on your way out the door or risk tarnishing the reputation you've worked so long to build. Here are some guidelines for leaving with your best foot forward.

When giving notice, put it in a letter with a simple explanation. State why you are leaving and when your last day of work will be, giving as much notice as possible. (The standard is two weeks.) Your boss or human resources department may ask you to participate in an exit interview, where you verbally express your reasons for leaving. Be honest and forthright. The information you offer could be used in a beneficial way to the company.

Don't leak the information that you're leaving to colleagues before you've notified your boss -- as much as you may be itching to do so. It is in poor taste, and could be detrimental should the news spread. Also, don't bad-mouth the company, even though you're leaving. What you say now can hurt your career down the road. It could haunt you in other business ventures or hurt your chances of ever being employed by that company again. Plus, if you ever want your boss or colleagues to serve as references for you in the future, they will likely be less than willing to do you that favor.

As tempted as you may be to sabotage office property, don't. Deleting company files or vandalizing company property will not only damage your reputation, and you could wind up in a possible lawsuit or land yourself in jail.

There are also a few chores that you should do before giving your notice:

- * Read the employee handbook and find out what benefits you are entitled to when exiting. You might be able to get paid for any unused vacation days, or be eligible for continued medical insurance coverage until your new insurance plan begins.
- * Discretely "clean house" before you give notice. Take home any personal



property and delete any personal e-mails or other files from your computer.

- * Gather important information. Compile a portfolio of your work. Get contact information for colleagues, clients, bosses, etc. This way, if you are escorted out the door immediately upon giving notice, you won't be without any important information.

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25 Lowest Paying Jobs in America

Whenever someone first enters the workforce, that first paycheck is anxiously awaited. Whether it's a teenager working for spending money or a recent college grad waiting for that first professional paycheck, simply put, getting paid for the first time is a great experience.

For some, however, the allure of that paycheck wears off once it's initially received, especially when the earnings are not what was expected. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, these are the 25 lowest paying jobs in the United States. Though some, such as waitress and bartender, are jobs where tips factor in heavily, deeming the reported hourly and yearly earnings incomplete and inaccurate, many of the following jobs are not tip-based and the figures are accurate.

1. Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers,
Average hourly pay: \$7.66 - Average annual earnings: \$15,930
2. Cooks, Fast Food
Average hourly pay: \$7.67 - Average annual earnings: \$15,960
3. Dishwashers
Average hourly pay: \$7.78 - Average annual earnings: \$16,190
4. Dining Room/Cafeteria Attendants / Bartender Helpers
Average hourly pay: \$7.84 - Average annual earnings: \$16,320
5. Hosts and Hostesses, Restaurant and Coffee Shop
Average hourly pay: \$8.10 - Average annual earnings: \$16,860
6. Counter Attendants
Average hourly pay: \$8.15 - Average annual earnings: \$16,950
7. Gaming Dealers
Average hourly pay: \$8.18 - Average annual earnings: \$17,010
8. Shampooers
Average hourly pay: \$8.20 - Average annual earnings: \$17,050
9. Waiters and Waitresses
Average hourly pay: \$8.27 - Average annual earnings: \$17,190
10. Ushers, Lobby Attendants, and Ticket Takers
Average hourly pay: \$8.41 - Average annual earnings: \$17,500
11. Amusement and Recreation Attendants
Average hourly pay: \$8.43 - Average annual earnings: \$17,530
12. Farm Workers and Laborers
Average hourly pay: \$8.48 - Average annual earnings: \$17,630
13. Cashiers
Average hourly pay: \$8.62 - Average annual earnings: \$17,930
14. Personal and Home Care Aides
Average hourly pay: \$8.74 - Average annual earnings: \$18,180
15. Lifeguards
Average hourly pay: \$8.85 - Average annual earnings: \$18,410
16. Parking Lot Attendants
Average hourly pay: \$8.87 - Average annual earnings: \$18,450
17. Food Preparation Workers
Average hourly pay: \$8.88 - Average annual earnings: \$18,480
18. Pressers, Textile, Garment and Related Materials
Average hourly pay: \$8.88 - Average annual earnings: \$18,470
19. Bartenders
Average hourly pay: \$8.91 - Average annual earnings: \$18,540
20. Graders and Sorters, Agricultural Products
Average hourly pay: \$8.95 - Average annual earnings: \$18,610
21. Cooks, Short Order
Average hourly pay: \$8.99 - Average annual earnings: \$18,710
22. Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners
Average hourly pay: \$8.99 - Average annual earnings: \$18,700
23. Child Care Workers
Average hourly pay: \$9.05 - Average annual earnings: \$18,820
24. Laundry and Dry-Cleaning Workers
Average hourly pay: \$9.08 - Average annual earnings: \$18,890
25. Service Station Attendants
Average hourly pay: \$9.21 - Average annual earnings: \$19,150

Easy Ways for Bosses to Boost Employee Morale

In the midst of a hectic work environment, it's sometimes easy to overlook your employees' need for positive reinforcement. If you own your own business, it's likely that your top priority is the business itself. You want to make sure you have a steady flow of work; that your customers are pleased with the service; and that you are making money. However, praising employees for a job well done or rewarding employees with periodic pay increases or other incentives, like extra time off, can do much to boost productivity and morale in a company. Also, don't overlook the need for company-sponsored events that invite employees to interact on a personal -- not business -- level. A bowling night, an afternoon at a baseball game or even a catered lunch will be eagerly anticipated by employees. Such events offer colleagues a chance to get to know one another and take a break from the stresses of work.

Find a Career That Can Weather the Storm

Even though no career path is absolutely immune to economic fluctuations, there are those that can weather the ups and downs much better than others. Rather than find yourself on the unemployment line the next time government officials take to the airwaves with poor economic news, it could pay to get into a career that's a bit more secure for the long haul.

Certain factors indicate that a career can ride out a recession. These include jobs that are in high demand, ones that require special skills, positions that continue to provide goods and services despite what is going on in the economy, and jobs offered by stable companies.

Recent statistics indicate that occupations such as construction, retail, transportation, manufacturing, and professional-type jobs, like lawyers and architects, are taking a hit in this economy. But others seem to take the punches and bounce back. The following jobs are ones you might want to consider in a recession.

Sales and marketing: An individual who makes or saves money for a company should be relatively secure in his or her position.

Education: Where there are students, there will be a need for teachers and administration officials to populate the nation's schools.

Healthcare and pharmaceuticals: It's impossible to turn back the hands of time and the Fountain of Youth has yet to be found. As people grow older the demand for quality healthcare and the medications that keep them healthy will be needed. Think about a job as a physician's assistant. Managed care companies look favorably on physician's assistants (PAs) because they earn less than doctors, but still offer the same general care.

Federal jobs: Few federal employees are let go, even during a recession. Government jobs generally lose employees only when employees leave and are not replaced. Federal jobs often feature steady periodic pay increases and good benefits, which make them attractive options for individuals looking for stability.

Computers: It pays to know the inner workings of computers and be able to program software or manage databases. Complex systems that require distinct skills will not fall out of favor.

Environmental industries: The green movement isn't going anywhere anytime soon, say experts. Now may be the time to jump on board in the environmental job of your choice.

Accounting: Thanks to ever-changing tax laws and codes, certified public accountants remain pretty steady during recessions.

Financial planning: Aging Baby Boomers need advice on how to propagate their nest eggs, securing the jobs of financial planners. Additionally, folks in general are looking for ways to stretch the dollars they do have a bit further.

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The Good and Bad of Franchise Businesses

Franchises are well-known business ventures. It is estimated that one in every 12 businesses in the United States is a franchise. One of the foremost franchise industries is fast food.

An individual thinking about opening up a small business at one point may consider a franchise operation. Before doing so, it's important to explore both sides of franchises to determine if it's the right business model for you.

Advantages - One of the first advantages to franchises is the established name. Name recognition can go a long way toward moving merchandise. A small business that is not a franchise will have to spend a good deal of time and capital establishing a solid track record and name recognition. A franchise likely already has this.

Corporate marketing is another advantage. While individual franchises will do their own advertising and marketing, the corporate entity will still be doing their own work toward promoting the business' name. This saves individual franchises money.

Money can also be saved on equipment and inventory. Franchises will have bulk purchasing power because franchises typically must feature the same brands and equipment throughout their satellite locations. Buying in bulk drives down the per-unit cost of many items.

Franchise owners will also have the benefit of other franchisee's past experiences. Routine meetings and strategy guides can help them navigate the tricky world of small businesses. While there will be some trial and error, franchises come with a playbook of sorts that may offer guidelines and strategies for success.

Disadvantages - Some of the advantages to franchises can also be disadvantages, depending on one's perspective. For example, working under the auspices of a larger entity restricts some of the creative freedom a small business owner might want. In general, franchisees must discuss ideas and decisions for the business with the franchisors before execution.

Franchisees are expected to pay dues to the franchisor. While money may be saved on other aspects of franchise ownership, the average royalty fees paid by franchisees range from 3 to 6 percent of monthly gross sales.

Any business venture will require an initial investment. However, franchise investment could be considerable. The average initial franchise start-up investment is \$250,000, excluding real estate. Some franchisors will also want to ensure that a potential franchisee has a considerable savings account for other expenses. Many times franchises are started by partners simply for the start-up costs involved.

While some franchises have a proven track record, not every franchise will work in a particular geographic area. Researching franchises takes time. And after all of that effort and application, a potential franchisee may still be rejected by the parent company.

The franchise business accounts for at least 40 percent of all retail sales in the United States. Explore whether this type of business model is right for you if you're considering self-employment.

Preparation Key to a Successful Career Change

Few years have witnessed more people attempting a career change than 2009 and 2010. Thanks to the economic downturn, many people found themselves out of a job and wondering what to do next.

For many of the nation's younger unemployed workers, such wondering commonly led to furthering their education. However, middle-aged workers who found themselves the victim of layoffs widely chose to seek a career change. Those considering such a change should know it won't be easy, but it could prove rewarding and doesn't have to be as difficult as it seems.

Consult a professional. Much like a recent college grad discusses his career plans with a guidance counselor or alumni representative, an adult considering a career change should consult a professional, be it an employment placement specialist or someone who works in the field you desire to enter, when beginning a job search. A professional can provide an accurate portrayal of the field and give advice or tips as to how best to get your foot in the door.

Do a self-examination. Arguably the biggest bright spot of getting laid off is the chance to do some self-examination as to what it is you liked, disliked or both about your old position. Too often workers get caught up in the commitments that come with being an adult and ignore whether or not they're happy with their job. But a layoff allows time for a careful self-examination, one that should allow you the chance to avoid finding yourself in an unfulfilling career that only pays the bills.

Get organized. Finding a job isn't easy. Finding one in an economic climate rife with layoffs is even less so. Have an organized plan of action, including a daily commitment to learning about your new field. Treat the time off not as a chance to completely relax, but a chance to research your new field, find out what it takes to succeed and devote daily time each day to looking for work.

Explore freelance opportunities. A resume with large chunks of time where you didn't work is never attractive. Successfully transitioning to a new career might require you do some work for free. Oftentimes, even the most successful freelancers spend large chunks of time doing work they're not going to be paid for. That's a part of freelancing. However, staying active, even if you're not getting paid, is a good way to show you're serious and committed to your new field.

Environmental Careers

Some people are so enthusiastic about all things "green" that they actually want to work in the field that supports their passion. With the influx of attention to environmental concerns, careers are abounding and are available for a variety of skill sets. If you're considering a green career, look over this list of possibilities:

Water and wastewater: Jobs regarding filtration, conservation and repurposing of community water supplies are in demand.

Parks worker: If you have a love of the outdoors, now is the time to apply for a position as a park or national forest ranger, or even an officer for the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Textiles: Individuals with degrees in fashion design or even agriculture can build upon the desire for organic fabrics.

Engineering/Building: New ways to implement environmentally responsible designs and products into homes and commercial buildings is ever-expanding.

Public relations: The environmental movement can always use some well-voiced people in its corner. Companies that specialize in green may be recruiting marketing and public relations professionals.

Tourism: There's now demand for eco-tourism, where guests participate in green activities and stay in hotels that promote green practices.