

## The 'toxic boss' is no sweetheart



February is the month of Valentines and love but soft fuzzy feelings or even a good night's sleep are difficult for those working under the tyranny of a toxic boss.

Webster defines toxic as deadly, poisonous and contaminated. Those bosses who, nine out of 10

employees would agree, are toxic probably would not see themselves as such. Even if the boss agrees that he or she is difficult, is it overly dramatic to say a difficult boss is toxic and therefore deadly?

Research shows stress causes health problems, and perhaps contributes to cases of cancer and heart attacks. You might say it is not a stretch to beware of a bosses who are abusive n they may be hazardous to your health.

There is also the health of the organization to consider.

Over 17 years of consulting with Fortune 500 and international organizations led us to observe that long-term success occurs when there is effective leadership and that effective leadership is the antithesis of belittling and micromanaging.

If consulting were not such a confidential process, it would be possible to share so many stories of leaders who led in a toxic manner and the devastation they brought to their firms. There is the CEO who hires talented people, encourages them to make decisions and then when they do, verbally abuses them in front of staff, clients and anyone else who happens to be around. In two years this company has suffered 100 percent employee turnover.

However, stories are anecdotal. Research is more informative and provides a basis for improving leadership in organizations

We recently completed research on 2,000 companies. We were interested in retention and motivation and designed a controlled research project to answer the question of the effect of supervisors on the motivation of their employees as well as discovering why talented employees left.

We gathered data on existing conditions in the companies as well as interviewed employees that the company wanted to keep but had lost as to why employees leave their companies.

The No. 1 reason they gave to their employer as they exited was "I'm leaving for a better opportunity." The No. 1 reason they gave Youngblood Consulting on a confidential interview was "I did not like working for my supervisor." Additional probing yielded information showing that 30 percent said they would define their boss as abusive.

Even more eye-opening are the research results that say in firms where bosses are considered abusive, almost two-thirds n 65 percent n of employees are looking for new employment and 94 percent report being unmotivated and disinterested in their work.

If you are wondering if you are n or if you work for n a toxic boss, here is our Top 10 Toxic List. Be concerned if you, or your boss, do three or more of these things:

1. Shame, embarrass and criticize employees in front of others.
2. Shame or embarrass employees in the privacy of your office.
3. Second guess employees' decisions - micro-manage them until they squeal.
4. Don't give clear direction to employees then blame them when they don't live up to unspoken expectations.
5. Instill fear by rapidly changing expectations or demanding unreasonable results.
6. Neglect to reward achievement but focus on punishing and/or criticizing for failure.
7. Send scathing e-mails.
8. Expect employees to drop everything when you have a brilliant idea that needs their support.
9. Reverse employee decisions, which encourages them to give up thinking.
10. Treat employees like you are the lord of the manor and they are, well, serfs.

If you are a toxic boss realize you will systematically lose your best people and your business will suffer until you get help and change your ways.

If you work for a toxic boss understand you are putting your health and serenity at risk. It depends on your role whether you think the news is good or bad. The news is the same.

Here's the bad news for the toxic boss and the good news for employees: "The economy is good enough that talented people can find another job if they feel they are abused."

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