

By Kathy Gurchiek

Your devil of a boss may wear Nine West instead of Prada to walk all over you, but there are ways to handle an overbearing supervisor, says a Purdue University expert.

Unreasonable bosses relish power and control, says William Krug, professor at the [Organizational Leadership and Supervision Department](#) at the university's College of Technology.

Bad bosses not only like having power and control but like to wield them as well, some to the point that their demands don't make sense to their subordinates, Krug said, but "they do it because they can."

It may sound basic, but strategies as simple as staying prepared and being accurate can have a calming effect on a boss who likes to throw his or her weight around, according to Krug.

Four types of bad bosses

It also helps to know whom you are dealing with. Bad bosses usually fall into one of four types—the controller, analyzer, promoter or supporter, Krug said.

In the recently released movie "[The Devil Wears Prada](#)," based on the book of the same name, Meryl Streep plays a dictatorial fashion magazine editor in Manhattan who makes life unbearable for her staff with unreasonable demands and around-the-clock phone calls.

She expects her assistant to obtain copies, within three hours, of the latest unpublished Harry Potter manuscript for her young daughters, and calls the assistant after hours to demand she find her a flight home despite a hurricane that is raging outside the editor's Florida hotel window.

She's a **controller**, demanding that things are done her way, wanting what she wants when she wants it.

Sometimes the very unreasonableness of a bad boss's demands makes those demands extremely difficult to meet, Krug observed.

"Sometimes it is a test, for whatever reason," he said, "and sometimes the extreme ones are doing it because they can make you jump."



Professor William Krug

Only after Streep's assistant locates the Potter manuscript and has copies bound and handed over to the children, with a back-up copy for her boss, does the boss start addressing the assistant by her correct name.

"Sometimes [overbearing bosses are trying to] check you out to find out when you are going to say 'no,'" Krug said, adding that employees who have financial obligations may not have a lot of options for making their work life easier.

The analyzer is overly detail-conscious and can't make a decision, continually demanding more facts and figures. The subordinate may be getting ready to head home for the night when an analyzer boss demands yet more new facts and figures.

"They can drive you nuts if you're a subordinate," Krug said.

The promoter has a "salesperson mentality, always excited about the next big task and getting it going," he said. "But, once it's going, they lose interest." They dislike detail, like to make quick decisions and often lack follow-up, he added.

Their subordinate is always mopping up behind this type of boss, trying to implement the project the boss initiated without having the power to do so.

The supporter is a people person, often putting employees first to the detriment of the organization. For example, this type of boss might be hesitant to insist that employees with a looming deadline work late on Friday night or over the weekend. The result: stressed-out subordinates who must work doubly hard to meet the next deadline.

"Even the cars the [bosses] drive and the clothes they wear kind of go in line with these four categories," according to a survey conducted in March, Krug told *HR News*.

Controllers typically drive power cars, such as Hummers, big pickups or SUVs, and their vehicles, like their clothes, are often dark colors, he said.

Analyzers typically drive economical cars, not necessarily flashy but a good value, he noted.

Promoters typically drive sports cars, which, like their clothes, are bright in color.

Supporters tend to drive practical cars, like minivans. The car color and clothes typically are pastel, neutral colors.

Coping strategies

Not only are bad bosses detrimental to morale, but they can chase off an organization's top talent, Krug said. Talented employees aren't going to put up with a boss's bad behavior, he says, because "they have the skills to go somewhere else."

There are some things, though, that an employee can do other than channeling any misery into blogs, chat rooms or Internet contests such as [MyBadBoss](#), a dubious honor that is sponsored by AFL-CIO affiliate Working America.

Knowing the type of bad boss you have can determine some general strategies for dealing with him or her, according to Krug.

For example, if an analyzer boss seems upset, provide adequate facts about the situation. Providing the same level of detail to a promoter, though, likely will only make a situation worse.

Krug offered the following strategies, which, he says, can have a calming effect on many bad bosses:

- Make sure your information is accurate and your facts and figures are correct. Being wrong gives your boss an edge, even if the way he or she is treating you is not warranted.
- Always document. Presenting facts circumvents any emotional fallout that often accompanies conversations between bosses and employees.
- In a dispute, let the boss be the decision-maker. Also, saying “the only thing we can do is this” might make him or her angrier. It’s best to offer a few options to help defuse a situation.

“Sometimes [bad bosses] may not perceive how they’re coming across; sometimes they do,” Krug said, and HR managers may need to talk to them constructively. The effectiveness of this, though, depends a lot on the kind of relationship a boss has with the HR department, Krug said.

It also is possible that a bad boss is behaving this way intentionally.

“If a company is really struggling to survive, then leadership has to take a more stringent [approach],” he said. And some CEOs have built a reputation on their ability to “chop heads and make cuts to turn [a] company around” and tend to be rewarded when they’ve accomplished that goal.

Krug, who has spent time in the military, also pointed out that if a company is facing a crisis situation, “there’s not a lot of time for discussion. It really depends on the nature of the business.”

If a bad boss is not in tune with an organization’s culture, it may fall to HR to point this out, although it “takes a lot of guts” to do so, Krug said. This is where an outside consultant can be valuable, he added.

One method is to use metrics—an increase in absenteeism, turnover rates, accidents on the job, increased sick claims or EAP usage, or survey findings on employee morale—to illustrate the fallout from a bad boss’s behavior, Krug said.