

MANDY'S BOSS HAD ONE ANSWER to get him out of all tight situations — *We'll talk about this later*. Even if the issue needed immediate attention, usually because of his foul-ups, the stock response would be, *We'll just talk about it later*. Of course, later never happened. Matter shelved, permanently!

Another trait of bad bosses is their selective amnesia. They will remember only what they want to remember. Their own mistakes are blissfully erased from memory.

Bad bosses. We've all had them some time. At a recent gathering of friends, we all discovered that bad bosses were not such a rare phenomenon after all.

Ms Not-Sure

A friend suffered under a Ms Not-Sure who could never make up her mind. She demanded a report and threw out the first one that arrived as "absolute nonsense". Bewildered as to what she wanted, her staff laboured through another 18 drafts until she finally accepted Draft No 19. The irony of ironies was when the chairman threw out all 19 drafts, settling for the first "absolute-nonsense".

Mr Jumpy

Then, there was a friend, scarred forever by her experience with Mr Ants-in-the-Pants, who never set realistic deadlines. He once requested information from another department the following Wednesday, only to badger his staff for a follow-up the very next day. When reminded of the next-Wednesday deadline, Mr Ants-in-the-Pants flew into a rage bellowing, Employees should not sit around and wait for things to happen!

Your career is in my hands

Bosses are so aware that they hold a strong weapon in their hands — the key to our career advancements. While the good ones use it to motivate, the bad ones just misuse it to shore up their own positions. Those with minds will never stand a chance.

A case in point: Henry's boss who judged each employee by how much he or she could visibly *kowtow* to him. Anyone who dared contradict him, was to be banished to the career cold storage bin. They would be routinely ignored and saddled with the most insignificant of jobs.

The mis-managers

Managers are supposed to manage situations. The bad ones make a mess and expect us to forget it. A boss I knew once ordered everyone in the office to stay back and await instructions to meet an important deadline. She herself went home and coolly forgot about it. The staff waited till way past midnight for that all-important instruction that never came. The next morning she walked into the office, behaving as if nothing happened. She called in the affected employees one by one, telling them to just forget the matter.

Nitpicking champs

Don't be fooled by bosses who claim to be perfectionists. They're often nothing more than nitpickers. Some could even be using their nitpicking ways to "control" their staff. If there's anything to admire at all in bosses like these, it's their tenacity to be able to spot the most insignificant mistakes. What else we detest — when they're on a witch-hunt, their favourites will get away scot-free. Their favourites will even get hugs and congratulations for having done a good job despite the huge obstacles in their way.

Worship me

Bad bosses treat their own bosses like God, accepting their word as if it was the eleventh Commandment, bowing and scraping in Bigger Boss's presence.... You get the drift! Unfortunately, they expect the same of you. It's easy to spot the boss's favourites because these are the ones who will spout the same philosophies as the bosses, sometimes verbatim.

There was another boss who wanted to make an impression on the chairman who was visiting. She wrote out Standard Operating Procedures for everyone. As per her instructions, a highly-paid employee was assigned to stand beside the carpark gantry, watch for the chairman's car, and press the button for the parking coupon so that the chairman wouldn't have to lift a finger. A few others were deployed to jog beside the car as it cleared the gantry



to the parking lot – all aimed to display her ability to think through details.

Creative critics

Look out for backhanded compliments that bad bosses use to keep you cowed. When they say you're a good organiser of files, they're only saying that in their eyes you're nothing more than a clerk. Otherwise, they're very stingy with compliments because either they are unaware of the power of positive strokes to motivate staff, or are afraid you'll ask for a raise. In the name of developing your potential and having your interest at heart, they'll heap on the criticism.

Idea killers

Lin had a boss who believed in "stage managing" meetings. He would get one of his favourites to suggest an idea that he wanted pushed. As soon as it was uttered at meetings, he would dwell on it, forsaking all other options. Funny thing was, he actually thought the whole office had no clue.

Express-yourself-to-death communicators

What do you say to a boss who hauled an employee to ask him to rephrase text on a pamphlet, which read: "Choose one out of two options". This is what he finally settled for: "There are 2 options. You can only choose Option 1 or Option 2. You cannot choose both. If you choose Option 1, please don't choose Option 2. If you choose Option 2, please don't choose Option 1."

The doubters

Another estate manager once refused to accept that there were 100 parking spaces available. An employee was promptly deployed to drive down to the venue to count. Final answer, 100 as earlier stated.



I spy with my little spies

The worse of the lot must be the ones who cultivate spies like the Gestapo. Nothing is safe from the eyes and ears of the favourites, who think nothing of snitching on their colleagues, reporting even the most innocent remarks as possible seeds of dissension. One boss always quoted the grapevine when accusing employees of what she saw as their faults.

Once, in order to "catch" the snitch, some colleagues deliberately let slip in the morning that they were going to raise a sensitive issue with the boss at the next meeting. Promptly, the meeting was cancelled and was not re-convened for the next few months.

The Gestapo had struck!

It would be easy to laugh off the antics of such bad bosses and move on, if we didn't have mortgages to pay. We all know bad bosses exist, no question there. What I want to know is, what can we do about it? ✕