

5 strategies to use against a backstabbing boss

By Rey Elbo | In the Workplace | May 4, 2018

A close friend from another department told me about my boss who is in the habit of belittling my work with other people, including with top management. He also uses me as a scapegoat for his failures. How do I retaliate for this unjust treatment? — Sacrificial Lamb



You don't retaliate. You don't have to go down to his gutter level of thinking. You only have to understand the whole situation with the following story.

A long time ago, a smart, but an out-of-school youth walked leisurely into the blacksmith shop minutes after the blacksmith had thrown a horseshoe on the ground to cool. Seeing it there, the young fellow reached down, picked it up, but instantly cast it aside as it burned his fingers. The blacksmith said:

“Kind of hot, isn't it son?” The brash kid said: “No, not too hot. It just doesn't take me long to look at that horseshoe.”

Indeed, faking an answer would bring you to a different level, but not necessarily to address the real issue and much less convince people around you. Just the same, we can't deny that you're unfortunate to experience such harsh treatment from your own boss, who is supposed to defend you from all troubles.

So, what can you do now? Would you like to fight city hall? What can you learn out of it? What can be done to avoid its future repetition? The key to all of these is seductively simple. Be proactively aware of the whole situation and assume that everyone, including your boss, has a sense of fair play.

Here are some specific ideas on how to deal with your situation:

- 1. Know the specific letter and spirit of your job — in writing.** That means understanding your job responsibilities, resources, and the timeline. All of these must be mutually agreed between you and your boss. If there are changes, ensure that everything is properly documented by e-mail or text message, if not in a memo. Usually, backstabbers will feign ignorance in the absence of any documentation or reference.

2. **Know your boss's work priorities and management quirks.** Everyone has his unique character and pet projects. Learn all of these from the perspectives of the boss. Avoid doing anything that your boss dislikes, and jump in front of the game when you're working on his favorite topics. Without appearing like a bootlicker, do everything needed so your boss notices your time and effort.
3. **Be honest and trustworthy, even if your boss is not.** Don't breach the confidence of your boss. If he says it's confidential, then treat it as such. No ifs, no buts. Since you're a person of lesser authority, you can easily get into trouble when the time comes. Whatever happens, keep everything entrusted to you confidential and don't be tempted to broadcast anything.
4. **Review the boss's expectations every now and then.** There's no harm in trying. You may be silently influenced by such negative talk about a backstabbing boss, but you can't go wrong if you ask your boss the key questions: How can I improve my work performance? It's difficult to do knowing that you have a backstabbing boss. But it's only the logical alternative to confronting your boss.
5. **Create situations where your boss will feel indebted to you.** It's not about money matters, but proving your worth beyond his expectations. This requires knowing every personal detail about the boss, including his birthday, hobbies and other extra-curricular activities. Then use them as an opportunity to warm up to your boss. This may include giving him a copy of the latest book about his favorite hobby, for instance.

It's easy to lose if you have a boss who treats you badly. However, blaming the boss or anyone for your situation is an exercise in futility. If you want to escape being the only person being blamed, you need to remain positive to improve your chances for success.

If you're optimistic enough to believe that hard work, rather than getting even with the boss, will do the trick, you will have plenty of time enjoying yourself at work rather than perpetually complaining about your situation.

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Your best friends are those who say many good things behind your back.

CATCH PEOPLE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT.

-Blanchard and Johnson, The One-Minute Manager

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