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## The New "Bad Boss"

For years, bad bosses were all the same: bullying, negative, micro-managing. They required instant action and complete loyalty. Nothing you did was ever good enough or done quickly enough. You never had a chance to respond before the bad boss barked out another order.

Years of management training courses and coaching and hundreds of books, magazines, and media have been directed at taming that kind of bad boss. We all thought learning "soft skills", "vision", and "emotional intelligence" would turn those bad bosses into good managers and leaders. You can judge for yourself just how well these efforts worked.

Now, however, we see a new kind of bad boss emerging. One for whom most of our training programs and coaching processes were not designed—the "paralyzed boss." This new kind of "bad boss" is much more difficult both for organizations and individuals to deal with.

The paralyzed boss essentially refuses to take clear action of any kind. He or she waits for some kind of signal from above. Whether the pending action is hiring someone, setting goals, or making a decision, the paralyzed boss waits to see in which direction the wind is blowing. Usually he or she has all those "soft skills" and "emotional intelligence." That's why paralyzed bosses survive for so long. They know how to charm—and delay—their own bosses and their direct reports.

A paralyzed boss curries favor with superiors, never disagrees with management, and hangs his or her

people out to dry, if the direction from above changes. These bosses also tend to hide from their people: behind closed doors, behind unanswered emails or voicemails, or behind canceled meetings.

Since these bosses are supremely attentive to their superiors, it takes a while for the organization to realize how much of an obstacle they actually are. They may talk a good game but stay paralyzed. For the status-quo people who just want to keep their job, a paralyzed boss is a blessing.

They only have to *look* busy to succeed.

But for the talented people who want to accomplish goals at work or who want to see personal achievement, these bosses are excruciatingly

maddening. Here are typical comments:

*"She tells me to wait until the reorganization, but it's been three months and I don't have new goals yet."*

*"I got a great review and a big salary boost, but most of my projects are on hold."*

*"We're in the third year of a major change process. We have an action plan, but nobody's done anything yet."*

It may be that all this talk of security and regulation is making paralyzed bosses more paralyzed, afraid of making any choice or taking any risk. If so, they are blighting the traditional American values of optimism and entrepreneurial spirit. It's time to shift our coaching and training toward energy and action!

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NEW!

## Ask Us...

***I am getting grossly underpaid at my job. I like the company and would hate to leave, but short of threatening to quit, how can I convince my employer to pay me more?***

People who have been at a company for a long time frequently have this concern. Their annual raises may not have kept pace with the market for their skills. But it's important to make sure you are right before you talk to your boss.

First, find out from friends, headhunters, or professional associations what you could realistically expect for a salary now. In the Dot.Com era, salaries were very inflated. They have dropped 20% for some jobs. Second, how is your company doing? Can it afford raises? If you have the data that you are paid below market and your company can afford it, meet with your manager.

Never threaten. Never imply, "You owe me!" Take the approach, "This has come to my attention, and I just want to be made whole here." If you can't be calm, practice with a friend until you can be. Give your manager time to make the adjustment, but always set a date when you will check back. And you might just draft up a resume in case you have a "paralyzed boss" and nothing ever happens.

## Success Story

*The name and some facts about this client have been changed to maintain confidentiality.*

### A Sales Person Leaves to Stay Challenged

"When they offered me the job, I knew I was the right person at the right time." Jim's new company was the industry leader, but it had recently suffered major losses to its smaller competitors.

Jim had worked very successfully for one of those competitors until a family emergency moved him back to New England. "So when I presented myself to the industry leader, they jumped at the chance to hire me.

"The first thing I was asked to do was to analyze all the numbers and come up with why the products weren't selling the way they used to. The report I prepared called for some major changes. I only submitted it to my manager. She was then going to show it to the big boss for his approval before we took any action.

"Then, the delays started to happen. She didn't want me to upset anyone on the team, so she asked me not to share it and had me redraft it. I pretty much did that same report over and over for six months. For someone used to being a star sales person, that was pretty boring. I didn't feel I was earning my keep.

"My six-month review included a big raise, but I wasn't really happy. I hadn't made a dent in the real problem. They were still losing business. I began to feel my personal reputation for being a big producer was in jeopardy. So I called my former company. They were willing to give me some real action. My industry-leader boss never did understand, even in my exit interview."

Reminder!

#### Ask...How to Get What You Want and Need at Work

by Priscilla H. Claman.

Available directly from Career Strategies at 617.227.5517  
and also from Amazon.com. Copies are \$14.95 each.

## We Recommend...

### THESE BOOKS:

***Career Warfare*** by David D'Alessandro  
(McGraw-Hill, 2004)

A great book, easy to read with lots of good advice and funny personal examples. Especially helpful: the two chapters on bosses, *Rule Two* and *Rule Three*, and the last chapter about mid-career issues, *Rule Ten*. Most relevant to the topic of paralyzed bosses: page 72, *The Wimp*.

***Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*** by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan  
(Crown Business, Random House, 2002)

Clear advice for executives who want to make things happen, not just hold onto a position. Especially helpful on how to select and coach people and how to hold them accountable: chapters 5 and 6. Most relevant to finding out who is paralyzed and getting in the way of action: chapters 8 and 9. Also includes some easy performance formats to copy and use.

### THESE SERVICES:

#### **On-Site Coaching**

*Is your organization in the midst of major changes? Do those changes make it hard to retain talent or to help others take action?*

Ask Karen Liuzzo about on-site coaching for only a day or a half-day a week: [kliuzzo@career-strategies.com](mailto:kliuzzo@career-strategies.com).

#### **Interactive Workshop**

*Do you need to reinvigorate your employees after a big project? Prepare them for intense teamwork? Reduce unproductive rivalry or politics?*

Contact Priscilla Claman about a creative and interactive Myers Briggs workshop: [pclaman@career-strategies.com](mailto:pclaman@career-strategies.com).

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