

KENNETH BLANCHARD

My Boss Makes Me Sick!



A boss can, quite literally, make you sick. Four behaviors can cause serious problems. Our

prescription for such illnesses is to put more PERKS into the management of your people.

CAN A BAD BOSS MAKE you sick? This is a question my wife, Marjorie Blanchard, a Ph.D. in Communications, and Mark Tager, an M.D. with extensive experience in health and wellness, asked people all over the country.

The answer they received was a resounding "Yes." They report the results of their study in their new book, *Working Well: Managing for Health and High Performance*, recently published by Simon & Schuster.

They found people were ready to give them all types of examples indicating stress symptoms caused by poor supervision. These symptoms include: sleeplessness, depression, feelings of panic and dread, stomach problems, headaches, high blood pressure, and ulcers. All of the people they studied attributed their problems to the way they were treated at work. Further, all fingers pointed to the boss for creating these problems.

Four Problem Behaviors

Based on their research, interviews, and case histories, Margie and Mark found that most devastating situations caused by a poor boss are based on the following behaviors:

- *Unpredictability.* Subordinates never

know when they are going to be chewed out. Trivial mistakes may bring on a manager's wrath while larger errors go unnoticed. There are no progress reports. The worker is simply told, "You'll know when you're not doing a good job!" This threat of impending doom causes unbearable tension and stress.

This unpredictability in behavior is very similar to what I have termed the "Leave Alone ZAP" style of management. People never hear when they are doing things right. However, if someone makes a mistake, ZAP, they really get hit. Now I'm calling this leadership style "Seagull Management." A seagull manager flies in, makes a lot of noise, dumps on everyone, and flies out.

- *Whittling Away at Self-esteem.*

Workers are continually criticized, often in front of peers. This puts emphasis on catching people doing things wrong. Good performance goes unnoticed. Poor performance is confronted and exposed in a very uncaring way. Constructive criticism can be valuable. Persecution and attack are degrading.

- *Win-lose Situations.* The manager needs to be "in control" at all times. He or she must always be "right." This is very typical with problematic managers. Essentially, they don't feel very good about themselves. In fact, I would describe their life position as "I'm OK—You're not OK." They act as though they are always right and everyone else is wrong.

In many ways, this life position is really a cover for "not OK feelings" these managers have about themselves. When a person doesn't feel OK about him/herself, the person has two choices. One is to hide and hope nobody notices. The other is to move out into the environment and seek to control it.

- *Under-stimulation, or Over-stimulation.* In the case of under-stimulation, workers are bored and feel helpless. Managers control all of the decision-making and are responsible for initiating activities. People have very little opportunity to use their own creativity. The situation is so controlled that procedures must be done by the book or else. This causes people to become listless and indifferent.

The over-stimulating managers create one crisis situation after another. Deadlines, workloads, etc., are piled on to spur on the worker. In the short term, this technique may bring results, but in the long run, it produces burnout. Ichak Adizes would call the over-stimulating managers "arsonists." The worst day of the week to work for an arsonist is Monday because they've had an entire weekend to think up new tasks and projects.

After identifying the problems related to poor health caused by poor supervision, Margie and Mark tried to find an answer to this dilemma. What can bosses do to create a healthy work environment?

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MY BOSS

The PERKS Model

Their answer was to develop the PERKS model. The PERKS model provides five techniques a manager can use to foster the type of environment that produces health and high performance among people.

The "P" in PERKS stands for *Participation*. Employees are involved in the decision-making, which strongly influences their performance. All across

3) Performance Evaluation (a review of progress made); during the evaluation, nothing new is discussed, just those items agreed upon.

The "R" equals *Recognition*. Credit for achievement is essential. Recognition helps people feel and act like winners. In fact, feedback is the "breakfast of champions." Once people begin to perform to a level where positive feedback is appropriate, they need to receive the type of recognition and praise they deserve. Catching people doing things right and recognizing these efforts—in terms of both verbal praise

the interaction feeling, "I'm OK—You're OK."

Delegating responsibility to a peak performer means they feel good about you and themselves. By supporting and listening to a reluctant contributor who has skills but lacks confidence, a manager begins to rebuild that confidence. Managers who provide the day-to-day coaching for a disillusioned learner who has some experience but limited commitment or motivation, can deal with this disillusionment and go beyond it.

Too often, managers are only around for the honeymoon and the initial excitement as their people take on new



LORI ANDERSON

To cure boss-related illness, put more PERKS into the workplace.

the country, companies are beginning to develop formal programs that promote a feeling of belonging and involvement. In our work, we are continually proving that the more people are involved with the decision-making process, the more committed they are to implementing those decisions in effective ways. People have a natural need to belong and to be involved in those things that impact their lives.

The letter "E" in the PERKS model concerns the *Environment*. In the ideal workplace, there are abundant opportunities to perform well. Creativity, risk-taking, and healthy lifestyle and habits are encouraged and supported. In my work, one of the key environmental factors is the performance review featuring the following three key aspects: 1) Performance Planning (goals and objectives are clear and understandable); 2) Day-to-Day Coaching (managers are committed to helping people win in whatever ways necessary); and

and tangible support such as salary—are essential for continued high performance.

The "K" in PERKS relates to *Knowledge*. Employees perform better when they understand the company's goals and can then identify their own roles in attaining these goals. All good performance starts with clear goals. People need to know what is expected of them and how they will be evaluated. Once this is clear to them, their role unfolds, and they are able to proceed in productive ways.

And finally the "S" in the PERKS Model stands for *Style*. Good bosses manage people in a style appropriate to the level of the employee's skills and commitment. That's what Situational Leadership is all about: different strokes for different folks. One thing has been repeatedly proven to me: if managers use the leadership style appropriate for the developmental level of their people—directing, coaching, supporting or delegating—everyone comes away from

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responsibilities and projects. Then they disappear, only to return when a mistake has been made. This is when the problems develop. The manager becomes upset and, ZAP, people begin to catch it. Then the people become excited, anxious, and ultimately sick over the situation.

Not too surprisingly, Marjorie Blanchard and Mark Tager found that a bad boss can make an employee sick. However, they have prescribed the PERKS Model which can reduce the illness generated by the growing national concern of on-the-job stress.

American companies pay one hundred billion dollars each year in total health care costs. That represents the second largest expense, after payroll, in all service businesses. Work-related stress affects individuals in their personal lives at home and in their job performance.

A bad boss can literally make people sick. To cure this sickness and to cut the related expenses, I urge all managers to put more PERKS into everyone's work environment. □

Working Well: Managing for Health and High Performance, by Dr. Marjorie Blanchard and Dr. Mark Tager can be ordered through Blanchard Training & Development Inc. by calling toll free 1-800-854-1013.