

How Do I Address My Manager's Increasingly Bad Behaviour?



Question: I have been working in my current role for over a year. My boss has always been a difficult person to work with. He can be very demanding and loud but I never had a real problem with him. Lately, however, his behavior has escalated. I cannot leave this job or make a complaint. What are my options?

Response:

Why Do People Act Badly?

Understanding why people behave badly can be a useful step in the process of managing the situation. Understanding is often at the heart of making changes in yourself and facilitating them in others.

Why would someone's behavior get worse? The possibilities include physical, psychological or emotional health concerns and/or problems in one's personal or professional life. You most likely not in a position to identify what is happening with your manager. Perspective may prepare you to approach the situation with Emotional Intelligence.

Employing Emotional Intelligence in 4 Steps

1) **Make Observations and Gain perspective:** Take time and pay attention. Has his appearance changed? Has he changed his activities? You may learn when to avoid talking to him or being around and you may see patterns that offer you clues as to what is happening.

2) **Listen To What He Is Saying or Not Saying:** Notice the topics or conversations that may lead to heightened negative behavior or topics he is avoiding.

3) **Ask Questions Tempered with Compassion:** If you are comfortable and feel safe doing so, find time to approach him in private and ask how he is doing.

Have noticed you noticed a pattern tied to a particular work project or workplace co-worker (including his own supervisor)? If so, consider saying something like “this project or person seems to be causing you some stress’. Following this statement, demonstrate willingness to listen or help. Ask him, ‘would you like to talk about what is happening?’ or ‘can I be of some assistance?’.

If his behavior seems to be tied to something you are doing or not doing, open up the conversation. For example, try saying, ‘you seem to be upset, I am sorry if I have contributed to your stress. Can we talk about what is happening and try to work together to identify a solution?’

Compassion begins by recognizing that the other person may be in distress or pain. That does not excuse bad behavior but it can help you begin to address the situation in a helpful way.

4) **Be Willing to Demonstrate Patience:** Change takes time. Your compassion and understanding may not be enough at first. However, if you can frame the situation in compassion you may find yourself better able to manage the impact of the negative behaviours.

Does this always work? Unfortunately, it may not always be enough. Developing a strategy that includes emotionally intelligent actions strengthens emotional intelligence skills. These skills are always useful. When you approach others with compassion, a situation is rarely made worse.

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