

How to Spot a Bad Leader II: Really Bad Leaders

Really Bad Leaders. Do you work for one of these?

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Some leadership scholars have argued that the majority of bosses are bad, ranging from merely incompetent to patently evil. While thousands of books are written on good, effective leaders, far less attention is given to really bad leaders - and it is these sorts of bosses that can make our working life a living hell. Do you work for one of these?

- **Narcissistic Leaders - It's All About Them.** Narcissists believe that they are the center of the universe and everything is about them. Criticism or any sort of disagreement is taken personally and is akin to mutiny. For narcissists you are either with them or against them, and only those in the inner circle will get favors and plum assignments.

One narcissistic boss created an "inner circle" of loyal admirers. The problem was as these followers learned the true nature of their leader, they left the inner circle one-by-one. At the end of the reign, the leader had only a few remaining loyalists, and they developed a siege mentality where everyone outside of the small circle was labeled an "enemy."

- **Laissez-faire Leaders - Fiddling While Rome Burns.** This is actually my personal boss from hell. Laissez-faire leaders basically don't lead. They occupy the position, but rarely make the decisions needed to move the team forward. Most simply are unwilling (or unable) to do the work that is required to lead effectively.

My favorite example is a boss who constantly turned down team members' requests for project funding, because it was too much of a hassle (we later found out). With team members scrambling around to find alternative ways of getting tasks done, and a departmental budget largely unspent, the administration cut the next year's budget drastically assuming that the funds were not needed.

- **Self-Serving - Me First, You Not At All.** These bosses try to take all the credit for the team's accomplishments and deflect all of the blame onto others for failure. Sometimes referred to as "Machiavellian," the goal of these leaders is to get ahead at all costs - and usually followers pay the costs.

I knew one self-serving leader who was very upfront about his Machiavellian nature, and tried to justify his behavior (and his bad leadership). "Look, a lot of the people who work for me aren't going anywhere," he said. "I'm the department head, so it just makes sense that the credit will go to me."

- **Deceitful Leaders - Lie to Me Once...** Research clearly shows above all that followers value integrity and honesty in their leaders. Leaders who are caught lying, particularly if they refuse to own up to the lie and ask forgiveness, will lose the trust of their followers. And often, odds are if your boss lies to you once, it is probably not the first or last lie.