

q advice: MANAGING A TOXIC BOSS

How to deal with a toxic boss when quitting isn't an option

Almost every week there is a new toxic culture story in the media and Australia is no exception. Allegations of toxic management have been reported at WiseTech, Country Road Group, Bureau of Meteorology and Sony Australia to name but a few. The culture at Nine News was alleged to be so toxic that one employee dubbed it 'Punishment Island'.

According to research, almost half the world's population dreads going to work. That feeling, in the pit of the stomach, of having to work in an environment of uncertainty, fear, poor communication, micromanagement, bullying, or daily toxic behaviours can be hard to bear.

Yet, what the research doesn't make clear, is that regardless of this feeling of dread, people will show up anyway, because, well, they have to. Groceries need to be bought, mortgages or rent needs to be paid, children need to be educated or loved ones have to be cared for. Far too often the advice - if you dread going to work - is to simply quit. For many this is simply impossible as the uncertainties are too great or the risks of loss of income too high.



So how do you deal with a toxic boss when quitting isn't an option? In my experience of having worked with individuals in this position there are always eight steps that I advise before thinking about taking on the uncertainty of quitting. They are as follows:

1. Look After Yourself First - In toxic work situations, your wellbeing needs to be the top priority. Regular exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate rest form the foundation of mental resilience. Your physical health directly influences how well you handle workplace challenges.
2. Excellence as Protection - Maintaining impeccable work quality to defend against unfair criticism. Model professional behaviour to ensure that there can be no blame laid at your own door.
3. Document Your Experiences - Dedicate brief daily moments to record your workplace experiences and feelings. Simple starters like "My feelings today...", "What impacted me..." or "Observable actions included..." are a good place to start. This has a two-fold advantage of creating an 'audit trail' of how you (and others) are treated and can also help to process your emotions.
4. Open Communication Channels - If it feels safe enough to do so, engage your manager in professional, focused discussions about specific concerns and potential remedies. Express how their actions or behaviours make you feel.
5. Involve HR Support - If direct communication with your manager isn't viable, bring your concerns to your human resources department. Present objective observations (as documented in point number 2) of what you've experienced.
6. Consider Internal Moves - If these approaches prove unsuccessful, explore transfers or temporary assignments within the company to both escape the toxic environment and broaden your experience.
7. Foster Relationships - Develop a reliable network of friends, colleagues, or mentors who can offer

support and perspective when needed. This safety net is essential for navigating difficult times.

8. Define Your Boundaries - Establish and maintain clear professional limits regarding your time, duties, and workplace relationships.

If more drastic action is required, then seek professional advice or else if you have witnessed something unlawful, then alert the authorities immediately.

I always advise against sharing your experiences on social media. Not only can this bring unwanted attention to you from the media and others, it can also lead to litigation which could destroy your reputation for future work.

That said, people often feel that they have no other option than to go public in order to bring their toxic boss to 'justice'. However, be aware that how the company chooses to deal with the allegations may not be to your satisfaction. Many toxic bosses have received payouts in the millions for bringing untold misery to the people that report to them.

No human being should ever suffer at the hands of a toxic boss and in situations where you are not able to quit (which will always be the best option) then employing the strategies that I have outlined here, will not only ensure that you manage your mental and physical health, but also provide you with an opportunity to deal with your toxic boss too.

*Colin D Ellis is a five-time best-selling author and culture consultant. His latest book **Detox Your Culture** will be released in Australia on December 3rd. Find out what kind of culture you have right now by visiting www.fiveculturesquiz.com*

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