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LEARN TO SPOT, AND SURVIVE, YOUR BOSS’ LEADERSHIP TYPE

Some years ago, I became intrigued with the behavior patterns of business executives with whom I’d worked and hypothesized that they represented particular leadership types. If they did (they did), I knew this typology could be helpful for employees.

Those employees who can understand the leadership behaviors of their bosses are more likely to manage them well. Those who lack such understanding are at risk for chronic tension and frustration with their bosses.

Based on my anecdotal analysis of data from 300 executive coaching cases and subsequent empirical research, I named these three types Remarkable, Perilous and Toxic.

A Remarkable boss stays focused on business objectives and leadership style. They’re mature, steady and balanced in their judgments.

Perilous leaders are generally just as gifted, but their effectiveness is compromised by their feelings of failure to achieve aspirations. They are rarely satisfied with their own or others’ work and their fundamental disappointment about their own success erodes their capabilities to develop others.

With the Toxic leader, it’s all about them — getting their needs met, feeding their egos, ensuring their visibility. They are prone to sudden outbursts and denigration of others.

Not all leaders fall neatly into type, and on any given day, where a leader falls on this continuum will vary.

You know you have a Remarkable boss if he or she believes in team-based leadership; strives to help people be successful; provides clear direction, affirmation and encouragement; expresses gratitude for work well-done; does the right things even when they might jeopardize his or her career advancement; communicates frequently and empathically; and can form healthy relationships. Leveraging the power of reciprocity is the key to managing a Remarkable boss. This means that employees interact with a boss in a manner that has replaced “what’s in it for me?” with the question “what’s in it for us?”

A Perilous boss can be harder to spot. Hallmark indicators are decision-making that ignores key people-related factors, lack of awareness of their impact on others, sudden outbursts of critical and/or hostile behavior, moodiness, lack of empathy for others' issues/concerns, and persistent political difficulties given their failure to work productively with peers — especially perceived rivals. Managing these leaders effectively begins by trying to minimize their discontent. For example, making overt comments about their talents and accomplishments — especially in front of senior executives — can have at least short-term positive effects.

Toxic leaders dominate meetings, put down others, impose their preferences about how things should be done, exhibit sudden and explosive outbursts, show extreme self-centeredness and self-referential behavior, and are unable to maintain respectful and caring relationships.

Dealing effectively with Toxic bosses is often more about surviving them versus managing them. One way is to increase peer communication at work — versus suffering in silence. Remaining united on key issues is key. Proactive and joint-problem solving can be helpful as an antidote to the Toxic boss's attempts to dominate. Planning one's escape begins with envisioning one's next career role, engaging others who are doing that work, and then landing the next work opportunity.

When thinking about one's own leadership abilities, remember that you are not consistently one of these leader types and that your special gift to whomever you lead — or love — is to strive to be Remarkable most of the time. These lessons for managing bosses — reciprocity, minimizing discontent, peerage and escape — might have enduring implications for managing our personal relationships as well.