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I BLEW IT WITH MY BAD BOSS... BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO

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Hello there, everyone. It is so great to have you here. Thank you for joining me today.

Today, we have something that I really think is important for so many people. I want to talk about difficult bosses because I am fairly sure that everyone listening to this podcast has had a difficult boss. It's hard not to have one at some point in your life. Today, I'm going to share a little bit about mine. She was a humdinger of bad bosses. I've had a lot of bad bosses in my career. Some of them are manageable, some of them, you just white-knuckled your way through it, which I don't recommend, by the way, but that's what I did. But this one was something else.

I really want to share a bit of that experience with you. But more importantly, I want to talk about why in hindsight, I think I blew it. I could have handled that situation so much better if I were a better leader, and more confident in myself. That doesn't take away from the fact that she was not a great boss. But that doesn't mean that just because I roll the dice and get a bad boss, doesn't mean that I have to all of a sudden, roll over, which is what I did. I will talk about that a little bit.

We'll talk more importantly about what we could do differently. What could I have done differently? What can you do differently to put together a bad boss strategy, because it's going to come up in your career? I want to give you the tools to help you optimize that experience and actually make it work to your advantage.

I also want to take this moment to talk about my own sense of gratitude around this podcast, particularly, but certainly around my career. I first wanted to say thank you to all of you for listening to this podcast, sharing this podcast, and telling people about this podcast. It's really helped me, it's energized me. You're giving me feedback about the podcast, what you want to hear about, what insights you took away, or how much is helping you. That's really driving me forward. I just want to say thank you so much. I am so grateful to all of you.

I also want to just say how grateful I am that I get an opportunity to do something that I really love doing. That includes this podcast, as well as what I do for a living now, helping people with their careers. I can't tell you how gratifying and fulfilling it is to help people get insights that help them have better lives. Because careers are such a big part of our lives, they really impact how we show up in our entire lives.

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If I can do my piece to help you have a more fulfilling, energizing, soul-inspiring career, then I want to be able to help you do that. I'm so grateful to have that opportunity. I want to thank all of you for allowing me to do that and thank myself, frankly, for having the courage to keep moving forward.

Let's talk about the topic today which is *I blew it with my bad boss, but you don't have to.* There's a saying that goes, *People don't quit jobs, they quit bosses.* That's not always the case. But it's often the case when someone leaves a job, it's because they don't want to work with the people that they're working with anymore. It's a very common thing.

As I said, having a bad boss is something that 99% of us are going to have to deal with, at some point in our career, and many of us more than once. According to Gallup, 75% of the reasons people quit come down to their managers. We do need to understand that number a little bit because even though 75% of people are saying that the reason that they quit is coming down to their managers, I think we also need to allow for the fact that that's not always the real reason.

But having an inexperienced, bad boss, who doesn't know how to lead, who makes your life really miserable, or challenging or difficult, or doesn't listen. All those horrible things that come with a bad boss, don't help the situation at all. It's more like it's exacerbating the situation that's already there, which is we give our power away to these difficult bosses. That's what I did. Or we rail against these difficult bosses, which also doesn't help the situation. It's like that fight or flight mechanism in our brain. For some reason, we feel threatened.

Our job, our happiness, something feels threatened and we go into flight or fight mode. Both of which are not helpful. I really think this particular episode is going to be very helpful to you because it's going to show you how to take control of that situation and look for opportunities. You still might end up leaving. Who knows? You might think what I talked about today is just too much work. I don't want to deal with all that work. I don't want to figure out how to make my bad boss work for me, in terms of my life, or how it fits into my plan or figure out the opportunities. I don't want to do all that work.

I get that. It's not going to be easy, for sure. But here are a couple of things. One, you might love your job, and not want to leave it so it might be worth it to you to do some of this work. But more importantly, if you run away every time you have a bad boss, you're going to be leaving jobs a lot, because bad bosses crop up all the time, out of our control. Having the tools, the thought process, and the mindset to be able to deal with this situation and find the opportunities, just having those is a superpower.

That means that you get to be in control of whether or not you want to stay in situations and how you can make them work for you. You don't have to run away from anything. So there are many ways that you can take control of this relationship and really make it work for you because that's the objective. It's making this relationship work for you. A lot of people do is they either dig their heels in. This is more of the fight part of it. *I know what works, they'll have to adapt to me, I've been here longer, this isn't right, they can't treat me this way, this is BS.*

They dig their heels in and they create that conflict situation for themselves. Or this is what I did, in this case, I'm going to talk about today, they roll over and play the victim. They try to please the boss who is often unpleasable. Even the boss doesn't really know what they want, so neither strategy really works well. They're not really strategies, to be honest. They're more reactions to the threat of this bad boss.

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So I'm recommending to you that you get really purposeful and strategic about your approach with this person. You have to decide for yourself, do you want this job or not? Or do you want to look at this as an opportunity to leverage growth in your career or not? Then decide consciously how you want to handle the situation. The only thing I'll say to you is as you're making this decision, make sure it's not something you're running away from. Don't run away from this bad boss situation.

You can say, *This isn't worth it to me. I didn't really love this job, anyway. I feel like I'm tapped out here and I want to go look for another job. This is the perfect time. I'm going to go towards something.* That's great. You know the difference in your heart. If you're rather thinking, *I hate this situation. I'm so frustrated. I can't take it anymore*. Maybe then you need to ask yourself, *Have you tried everything? Have you really tried to optimize this situation?* Because I'm telling you, like I said, something like the last time, you're going to run into a bad boss. So it's a great opportunity to at least practice.

I'm going to walk through some suggestions today. I want to talk a little bit about my bad boss situation and set that up for you a little bit. Like I said, she was the worst of the worst. I've been a crappy boss before. I have had a lot of crappy bosses, but this woman, she just took the cake. I do want to say this, though. People change. I've changed and learned over the years. I've become a better boss over the years. Maybe she's changed. Maybe she learned from her mistakes.

In the meantime, though, she did have a big hand in creating an environment where people had to struggle. It was stressful, difficult, and anxiety-ridden for a lot of people in different ways and manifests in different ways for different people. But she did create that environment. The reason she did this was because she was the kind of boss who was just really insecure and totally full of herself, at the same time. It was these two extreme ends of the same continuum.

She was a total bully because of that. She had to be right. She had to have the last word. She was threatened by other smart people and so she did her best to put them down, particularly if they disagreed with her, she would always turn on them. She had to be the smartest person in the room. Honestly, she reminds me a lot of Donald Trump, and I don't want to get political in this podcast.

I don't care whether you love him or hate him. But she was a lot like him in terms of a leader. If you watch him on the news. I watch him sometimes which I like, she reminds me of him or he reminds me of her. You might think he's doing great things for the United States or not, but ask yourself this, *Would you want to work for him?* That's a totally different thing. You see, you hear about him on the news all the time. People in his administration are dropping off and quitting all the time because he's a difficult person to work for.

This lady I'm talking about, she was really smart. I remember when she started, I thought to myself, *Wow, this is going to be so great.* She's such a smart person, with amazing vision, and amazing experience in what she does, I'm going to learn so much from her. I wasn't the only one who felt that way. A lot of the people, a lot of my peers who were also reporting to this woman, were also really excited about it. But this boss was the kind that really just wanted her own people. That happens. It's not always fair, but it happens.

So many of my peers, including myself, were getting in her way. She was systematic in how she was removing people one at a time. It's really a cowardly way of approaching things, to be honest. It's like when you're younger and you want to break up with someone and you just ghost them, or treat them really badly, or try to get them to

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break up with you. That's what she was doing to people in a weird way. I think that's terrible. It's very selfish. It's a very selfish way to get rid of someone by breaking them down and playing mind games with them. It's just so evil.

If you're a manager in that situation, get up the courage to just lay it out. Get rid of the person. Find a way to amicably break up the relationship. I think, in her case, though, the other thing she had to do was try to build a case to get rid of each one of us because we're all actually really good at our jobs. It couldn't just be I don't like them, get rid of them, she needed to build a case as to why it was the right thing to do.

In my case, she would ignore me in meetings. She basically ghosted me at work. She wouldn't include me in key decisions that were part of my department. She'd go around me to my people. She would freak out for the smallest things. I was a senior director. Even if she didn't agree with all of my decisions, even the teeny tiny ones that were incidental, she would make those into huge issues about my judgment. And worst, she wouldn't have my back.

In fact, if I did something that she disagreed with, what I'm going to say was wrong, and something she disagreed with, she would not only blow it up, and not have my back on the situation, but she would rally influencers to also agree with her. She was running a political campaign, essentially. I didn't really get that at the time. But I see that now. Especially when I see Donald Trump in action, I totally get that strategy and what she was doing.

The biggest challenge with it was, I became the victim. I wanted so much to learn from her and for her to *'like me,'* that I tried to do things the way that she wanted. I tried to figure out what I needed to do to please her. I got upset when she wasn't happy. All these things when she wasn't happy with what I was doing, made me so much more insecure, that I would complain about her walking all over me. I have to say that, as a senior director in a big Fortune 500 company, that is not the way that I would have expected someone to behave, meaning myself.

Forget about her, she should not have behaved that way. But I also should not have behaved that way. What I should have done was keep my confidence and not give away my power, sat down with her, and understood her agenda as it was going along because it kept changing. Letting her know it wasn't working for me, setting my own boundaries, and standing up for myself, not being intimidated by authority. It doesn't mean I have to rail against the machine. It doesn't mean I have to fight. Just stand my ground.

There are some basic strategies that you can use that I should have been using. It took me a while after that experience to forgive myself for how I behaved. I was mad at myself for how I behaved. I was mad at her but I was also mad at myself for how I behaved in that situation. I think it's normal that I behaved that way, to a certain extent, because I think that's just instinct in that moment. But given that situation, again, I would handle it very differently. The bottom line, I gave away my power.

So I want to help you out and encourage you not to give away your power when you have a bad boss. Decide on how you want to handle that situation. I want to go through three things right now that you can do to really take on that bad boss situation as an opportunity.

The very first thing that I suggest is to get clear on the kind of bad boss you're dealing with. Then you can put the strategy together to manage it. The reason I say be clear on that kind of bad boss is because you want to be able

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to fulfill what your bad boss needs to be successful so that in turn, you can be successful. I'm not talking about what I was doing, like please people. That's not what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about understanding the motivation behind why your bad boss is acting that way, and then helping fill in the gap. Understand as well that I don't mean to go outside of your integrity. You have to stay in your integrity, what's right for you, and what you're comfortable dealing with. I see a lot of politicians on TV right now, going outside of their integrity to support their party on both sides of the fence, doing a complete 180 for what they have said in the past.

I'm not saying you have to go that far. Unless you are comfortable doing it, which is fine, too. Everyone is different. But you need to figure out how to leverage that motivation of your boss to your advantage.

Let's take an example. If your boss is controlling, then just give them what they need to feel secure until they build trust. I had a client once. His boss was very controlling. A new manager. It's normal that bosses get controlling. The reason they're controlling and they're trying to control you, and everyone around them in the whole group is because they're insecure. And they think that if they and everyone on their team do everything their way, then nobody can fail. Nothing is going to go wrong. Now we know that's not the way things work.

I did have this client who had a boss like that. She would be horrible to him. She would yell at him in public, tell him he wasn't doing a good job, and tell him exactly how he needed to have things done. She was a great executor and he wasn't a great executor so she felt like she needed to tell him exactly how he needed to execute, in order to make sure that he didn't drop the ball.

What he did was, he decided he wasn't going to listen to her and he was going to do things his way, anyway. He would say, *Yeah, yeah, yeah, got it, got it, got it.* Then completely ignore her and go do it his way. So he, in effect, was in fight mode. He was being an aggressor. He wouldn't stand up to her in her face. It was eating at him emotionally that she was treating him this way, which, again, from that standpoint, he was playing the victim, not listening, and doing his own way anyway, which just made her more insecure, and more controlling.

If you have a controlling boss, why not try doing it that way for a while? It's not going to hurt that much to just try to do it their way. The idea is, to do it their way for a little bit until you build trust. Until they see that you can do it their way and you can start embedding new ideas slowly into the process, in terms of how you'd like to do it or throw up ideas. They're going to start to say, *Okay, she's doing it my way. We're getting results.* Then they're going to start to be open to you adding value to the process. That's how you can manage the gap.

Understand that your boss just wants to control because they feel insecure. So help them feel secure by doing it their way. Once they trust you, you can start adding value, you can start injecting ideas into it. But until they feel like, *Okay, I'm confident in this person that they're not going to drop the ball, and they're not going to make me look like a failure, w*hich is what their concern is, what their motivation is. Until they feel secure in that they're not going to let you add value.

So you're not going to change your boss. You cannot change your boss. They're controlling. They're dealing with their own crap. What you could do is leverage the motivation in terms of them feeling insecure about it. Help them feel secure about you so that ultimately, you can come back to what you want to bring into the process.

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If your boss is disengaged, someone who just doesn't really engage in the process or is focused on their own thing, you have to keep going and explaining everything to them and letting them know what's going on, and all that kind of stuff. If your boss is disengaged, just just handle it. Thank them for empowering you. Keep them informed and then fill in any gaps that arise. Make sure that they know what's going on. They have a hand and what they want to have a hand in, but then just keep leading.

This is a great opportunity for you to demonstrate your leadership ability. Don't do it in spite of your boss, do it with them, by thanking them and empowering them, keeping them informed. By then it's your opportunity to take the lead.

If your boss is a bully, like the one I had, don't be intimidated. Don't feel threatened because the threatened feeling triggers that fight or flight mechanism. Stay in your power. I know it's a tough one because quite often, when people are threatened, the threat comes from authority. I don't want to lose my job. But just remember, your boss alone can't fire you. They can't decide that they don't like you and they want to fire you, just like my boss couldn't. She had to build a case. If I had stayed in my power, I would have made it really hard for her to build a case.

Don't worry about that. They're just a person. It doesn't mean they know more or less than you. It doesn't mean they're smarter than you. It doesn't mean any of those things. Stay in your power. Listen to what they're saying but stay in your power. When your boss is being a bully, when they're yelling at you, or when they're doing something bullish, a couple of things. Start by taking a breath, reground yourself, and give yourself a second just to think about it. The important thing is don't take it personally.

Your boss is behaving this way because they don't know how to behave any better. They are insecure for some reason in that situation. You don't have to own that. Don't take it personally, even if what they're saying is directed at you. It doesn't mean they're right. Remind yourself of that. Take a deep breath and then just think about how you rationally want to handle the situation.

If you need a second to think because there's a lot coming at you, these situations can be really hard, then just ask a few questions. Not only to stall to give yourself more time to reground yourself, but also, just to better understand what's really bothering your boss in that situation. It's okay to choose your moment before you say anything. Like if you're in public, and you want to say something to your boss, and you don't think it's the right time to say it, just make sure you circle back later.

But if your boss is purposely trying to intimidate you, remember, you're good at what you do. Even if you make a mistake, it's okay. You're human. People are allowed to make mistakes. It's not an excuse for your boss to treat you this way and it doesn't mean you're less capable. So stay in your power. Mistakes don't make it okay and it's not a reason for you to step out of your power.

If your boss is untrustworthy, like someone that you know will just change the story, just document everything. CYA. Cover Your A with the other influencers in the organization. You don't have to be overt in your covering-yourself approach. You don't have to send your boss CYA documents every time you have a conversation because someone untrustworthy will start picking up on that. They're documenting everything I say and that's going to make them nervous.

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You want to document the key things, the key decisions, and then keep your own notes of everything that's happening. You want to keep your relationship strong with the other influencers in the organization. And I'll talk about that coming up.

The other thing I'll say here is really important with an untrustworthy boss. Not only keep good notes but don't talk about the fact that your boss is untrustworthy. Even with the influencers in the organization, don't tell people that you're just trying to cover your butt on this so you want to let them know. Don't be overt about it. Don't talk about your boss to your colleagues or your peers, and the fact that they are untrustworthy. That's just gossip, it's not going to help you.

Make sure you're covering your butt with the right people. Make sure you're documenting things but don't talk about it because that'll make you look untrustworthy. And that's counter to what you need to be doing.

All of what I just talked about is just to be clear on the kind of bad boss that you have. Are they untrustworthy, a bully, controlling, or disengaged? Understand their motivation and understand how you want to strategize your approach to that situation for the best solution for you.

Second, act like a leader. Rise above this situation. Avoid emulating your bad boss' behavior. Just because they are a bully, doesn't offer license for you to be a bully. Rise above. Demonstrate your outstanding leadership, regardless of your boss's shortcomings. Be trustworthy. If your boss is untrustworthy, be trustworthy anyway, but certainly, if your boss is untrustworthy.

When in public, always support your boss. Even if they wouldn't do the same for you, always support your boss. Don't undermine them, don't gossip about them, don't criticize them openly or behind their back. Just keep it tight. And if you have a problem, speak to them about it directly. That's what leaders do. The benefit of doing that is that many bad boss behaviors are driven by insecurity.

A lot of our own bad behaviors are driven by insecurity and so are theirs. If your boss knows that you always have their back, that you're trustworthy, that you're filling in the gaps for them, that you're making them look good, they are going to trust you. They're going to want to have you around, they're going to treat you the way that you are now deciding that you want to be treated. You are putting yourself in a control position.

The more of a leader you are in these situations, the better it's going to be for you. And people in the organization that you work for are going to notice. Just because you notice that you have a bad boss, doesn't mean nobody else noticed. People notice these things. When they see that you are rising above, that you are being a leader, that you are not talking about them, all that kind of stuff, they are going to say, *Hey, so and so is really handling the situation beautifully.* And that's going to benefit you in the long run.

The third thing I want to talk about is protecting your brand. So you're doing all this stuff, you are deciding what kind of bad boss you have and filling in the gaps. You are acting like a leader and not talking about your bad boss behind their back or gossiping or being untrustworthy, in any way. At the same time, you need to protect your brand because like I said, people are always watching. So keep your internal relationships strong, no matter what.

Make sure that you keep your peer relationships strong, your subordinate relationships strong, your supplier or vendor relationships strong, and even your industry relationships strong. You want to have relationships outside

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of your organization. Focus on doing your job and being a really outstanding leader to your team and to your peer group. That's going to allow your peer group to see and also tell their bosses what a great job you're doing. And that's what you want to hear.

When people get around the table, or senior management gets out and around the table and discusses their people, you want your peers' bosses to know and have a really great impression of the work that you're doing. Because everyone else sees the great job that you're doing, your position is strengthened. As everyone sees how you are beautifully handling this difficult boss situation, your position is strengthened. So make sure other influencers in the organization and even in the industry support your work.

I would suggest singling out two to three influencers in your circle who really have an impact on your success. Invite them for a coffee from time to time. Get to know them, get their specific point of view on the projects that you're working on, and ask for guidance on your career plan. Try to work on projects where those people can see your impact. Don't talk about your bad boss with these people. That's not about what this is for. This is more about building your own relationship with these people.

Even if these people ask, how's it going with your boss? And they will ask because they are going to see what's going on. Just keep it neutral. Don't talk about the challenges that you're having with your boss. Turn it back around by asking them a question. You can say something like, *Oh, it's going good. What makes you ask?* And if they have something they really want to understand, they're going to ask you and you can decide, or you just keep it neutral by saying, *I'm learning a lot about blank*.

Just fill in the blank, because you are always learning something from your boss, regardless if they're bad or not. Or don't even make it about your boss. I'm learning a lot about blank and it can just be about your job. Don't even make it about your boss. There are lots of ways to answer these questions. Don't get pulled in. They're trying to pull you into this rabbit hole of your relationship with your boss, don't fall for it. Because again, that's going to make you a stronger leader.

I know how hard it is to do all of these things I'm talking about. It takes practice. I have blown it more times than I've gotten it right. I'm going to be completely honest with you. But my job now, with a clear head, is to share my experience and how I would have done things differently or how I do things differently now, in some cases. Take from this what you want to start practicing.

How did it end with my bad boss situation? It actually ended pretty well. I'm not going to say that it was the best outcome because again, I could have taken better control of that situation. But I was able to orchestrate my exit. I was lucky the company was downsizing. I was able to put up my hand and say I'll take a package. Even though my department was not one of the ones that was downsizing, I was able to do that. I started taking control back. I'd started getting to the end, rock bottoming my situation and I was like, I need to do something about this. I can't live like this anymore.

I started thinking about and orchestrating ways to leave and then this opportunity came up. So that was fantastic. But I have to tell you that I have gone really far down the rabbit hole. I had impacted my ability to function with my self-belief. I had a long way back from that experience. I did some damage to my self-confidence, for sure.

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I just want to leave you with the thought that you need to take control. Look for opportunities. You might end up leaving, you might think this is too much work. That's fine. It might be. It really depends on how much you like your job, how your job fits into your plan, and the opportunity your bad boss actually could afford you in your own career development. Because like I said, if you run away every time you have a bad boss, you're going to be leaving a lot of jobs. It's way better to assess the situation and say, *How can I use the situation to my advantage to help me grow?*

That's it for this week. Thank you so much for joining me, I really appreciate you. I will be talking to you next week. Bye for now.

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