

How bad does a boss have to be before employees bolt?

New survey identifies five worst kinds of behaviour

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How bad does a boss have to act before employees decide to flee?

A new survey sheds light on what employees consider the five worst kinds of behaviour by bad bosses.

The on-line survey at the website <http://www.keepem.com> asked respondents to choose from a list of 43 kinds of bad behaviour by bosses that would prompt them to bail.

Based on the 2,000 responses, including about 100 from Canada, the worst offences were:

Belittling people in front of others, cited by 40.5 per cent of the respondents.

Lying, which was a factor for 34.2 per cent of disgruntled employees.

Being condescending or demeaning to subordinates, which was identified by 31.5 per cent.

Humiliating or embarrassing others in public or private, which featured in 23.9 per cent of decisions to leave.

Micromanaging, which was cited by 21 per cent. Because many people ticked off more than one factor, the numbers don't add up to 100 per cent.

Bosses who don't work to eliminate these negative kinds of behaviour are destined to find their own careers shortened, warns Beverly Kaye, co-author with Sharon Jordan-Evans of *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay*, who did the survey on their website over the past year.

"In today's competitive environment, it is critical that organizations keep their stars and successfully recruit needed new talent. Bad bosses are unable to do either," Ms. Kaye says.

"No organization can afford to have bad bosses if it wants to keep its best people."

The answers were consistent regardless of respondents' occupation and location, Ms. Kaye says, but there were differences between men and women.

Men cited micromanaging twice as often as women. Meanwhile, employees who cited humiliation or embarrassment were almost invariably women.

Younger respondents were more likely to choose micro-managing as a hot button.

Older workers, on the other hand, were more consistently put off by lying, which showed up as a top-three concern identified by Canadians of all ages, Ms. Kaye says.

The authors say that there are solutions to bad bosses for employees, short of quitting, and for employers, short of firing them.

Ms. Kaye says bad bosses can change -- if they are shown how their behaviour is lowering morale and pushing employees out the door.

"Just as you can learn new leadership skills at any age, you can stop behaviours that make you a bad boss and then, hopefully, replace them with more effective behaviours," she says.

This starts with letting the boss know there is a problem.

"There are situations where a boss displays behaviour simply because he or she doesn't realize it is perceived as bad behaviour," Ms. Kaye says.

Employees should try to speak with the boss directly but, if they feel they aren't being heard or are unsure how the boss will react to their feedback, then they shouldn't shrink from the duty.

Instead, they go higher up the chain of command and let more senior executives know that the manager's behaviour is reducing effectiveness of the organization, Ms. Kaye suggests.

Employers who see a problem in their bad bosses should confront them, be clear on what specific behaviour problems are, then require them to take action to improve on it and report back on what they are doing to change things, Ms. Kaye says.

To get the bosses motivated to change, Ms. Kaye says that it is important to show how there is something in it for everyone.

"When you're clear about the payoff, they are more likely to get serious," she notes, especially if that payoff is being able to keep a job.

Bad bosses would be wise to seek out coaches, counsellors and self-improvement seminars to help make changes, Ms. Kaye recommends. If they are doing several things wrong, they should work on one at a time, she suggests.

All through the process, bosses should ask trusted colleagues to monitor their progress and give them feedback on changes being made, she suggests.

"Given the cost of voluntary turnover, changing their own negative behaviours can be the most important action a bad boss can take," Ms. Kaye concludes.