

The background of the slide features a black and white illustration of four people in a meeting. One person on the left is standing and holding a laptop, while three others are seated around a table. The scene is set against a background of vertical lines, suggesting a window or a modern office interior.

# SO, YOUR BOSS IS A JERK...

You aren't alone – according to a new Gallup poll, 82% of U.S. managers are wrong for the job. How do so many jerk bosses get to the top? What can you do if you work for one? And, what can you do if you *are* one?

# MOST OF US WORK FOR A JERK

Research by Hogan's founders, psychologists Joyce and Robert Hogan, and psychologist Rob Kaiser shows that at least 50% (and as many as 75%) of managers will fail, and a Gallup study showed that number could be as high as 82%. In other words, the odds you will work for an incompetent manager at some point in your career are pretty high, and it's having a huge impact on engagement.

- Only 30% of U.S. employees are engaged
- Only 13% of employees are engaged worldwide
- One in 5 employees is actively disengaged
- Companies with engaged employees average 147% higher earnings per share
- Low engagement costs companies \$300 billion each year
- 75% of people say their immediate supervisor is the most stressful part of their job
- Stressed workers perform 50% worse on cognitive tests

**Bad managers aren't just bad for business; they can literally kill you. Swedish researchers published a 2008 study that found employees who had incompetent, inconsiderate, secretive, or uncommunicative managers were 60% more likely to suffer a heart attack or other cardiac condition.**

## SO, YOUR BOSS IS A JERK...

Most organizations fill their managerial positions one of two ways: (1) they promote current high performers or (2) they promote people who seem leader-like. That seems right, but research shows that only 30% of current high performers have leadership potential. And, the same bold, attention-grabbing behavior that makes someone seem leader-like to their manager tends to alienate peers and subordinates.

# WHY ARE THERE SO MANY?

Researchers asked people to describe their worst bosses

**52%**

described their worst  
boss as

**ARROGANT**

**50%**

described their worst  
boss as

**MANIPULATIVE**

**48%**

described their worst  
boss as

**PASSIVE  
AGGRESSIVE**

SO, YOUR BOSS IS A JERK...

# FIXING

How can organizations keep their upper ranks from filling with individuals guaranteed to damage morale and lower productivity?

# THE LADDER

First, organizations should look at leadership as a resource for the group rather than a privilege for the individual. Rather than promoting someone to reward them for good work, organizations should promote individuals based on their ability to build and maintain a productive team.

Second, organizations should change the manner in which they identify leadership potential. Performance appraisals typically reflect how much supervisors like their subordinates. Consequently, the managers who move up are often more skilled at office politics than actual leadership. For a true assessment of leaders' abilities, companies should combine objective measures like personality assessments with peer- and subordinate-level 360 reviews.

# DEALING WITH A JERK

***“The Jerk Store called, and they’re running out of you.”***  
- George Costanza (1997)

Seinfeld fans will recall George’s ill-fated attempt to deliver the perfect comeback to a smart-ass coworker. Rather than trying to outdo them, the key to dealing with jerks, or any other kind of difficult manager, is to understand them.

“Bosses are just like any other human: unique but predictable,” said Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, vice president of research and innovation at Hogan. “The best way to manage your manager is to figure out who he (or she) is, what he wants, and why he behaves the way he does. Then, adjust your behavior to fit his or her personality.”

- **Is your boss impulsive?** Impulsive bosses are driven by feeling rather than reason, so tune into their moods. Share your ideas when they are already feeling excited.
- **Is your boss creative?** Creative bosses jump from one idea to the next, so avoid any discussion of admin details, bureaucratic processes, and rules. Admire their ideas and show interest in their eccentric suggestions.
- **Is your boss the quiet type?** Respect their privacy, restrict communication to email exchanges and impersonal notes, and avoid disclosing any personal information about yourself – it will make them feel awkward.
- **Is your boss a hedonistic workaholic?** If your boss wants to be friends with his or her employees, you’d better join the party. Most of your colleagues will, and if you never join they will regard you as boring, snobby or unfriendly.
- **Is your boss neurotic?** Bosses who are stressed or worried all the time need employees to counsel and empathize with them. Soak up some of the pressure by doing work they hate and being a reliable resource.
- **Is your boss Machiavellian?** If your boss is obsessed with office politics, be sure to play the game. Feed him (or her) gossip and stay close to his inner circle, but don’t trust him.
- **Is your boss narcissistic?** This type of boss is the easiest to recognize, and all you need to do is be a good audience and he or she will love and promote you.

# WHAT IF YOU'RE THE JERK?

Research shows that as many as 75% of managers have trouble managing their behavior, which means if you have people working under you, odds are some of them think you're a jerk. What can you do?

Although our personalities are fairly stable over time, influenced by our early childhood experiences and even genetics, a well-designed coaching intervention can achieve behavioral improvements of 25% up to 50%, a noticeable improvement.

- Start with self-awareness. Most people are generally unaware of how others see them – this is especially true for managers. Valid methods such as personality assessments or 360-degree feedback provide an objective view of your strengths and weaknesses.
- Compensate with alternative behaviors. Use positive behaviors to rebuild a reputation marked by counterproductive behaviors. As positive behaviors are demonstrated multiple times, your reputation will begin to change.
- “Identity – who you think you are – drives behavior, and how you behave creates your reputation,” said Hogan founder Robert Hogan.
- Support weakness with resources. If you have clear weaknesses, sometimes the most effective development strategy is to compensate by supporting them with additional resources.
- Redesign your job or assignment. Most managers got where they were because they were a valuable individual contributor. Rather than letting them struggle as manager, companies sometimes alter their job requirements to remove roles in which they struggle.



# THE BOTTOM LINE

The bad news is that there is no single solution to the problem of bad bosses. However, by working to understand your boss's personality, you can make having a jerk for a boss more tolerable. And by shifting their hiring and promotion practices to focus on identifying candidates and incumbents with actual leadership skill, rather than looking for people who simply seem leader-like, organizations can reduce the number of bad leaders in their ranks, increase staff morale, and become more effective, innovative, and profitable.