

The Secret to Working with an Unpredictable Boss

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Working with an unpredictable boss can be rough. You're confused when they change your assignments repeatedly. You're hurt when they act friendly one minute and snub you the next. You're angry when they yell at you in front of your colleagues.

The solution may depend on their attitude. If your boss treats you with respect while they're moving the goalposts, you may be able to maintain a healthy relationship. That's especially true if you work in an industry that requires a great deal of flexibility and rapid responses.

On the other hand, if you're feeling bullied, you need to find coping strategies to protect your wellbeing and career.

Consider these tips for dealing with a volatile boss.

Steps to Take Yourself:

1. **Stay calm.** It's natural to take things personally when your boss has frequent outbursts. As long as there is no valid issue with your performance, you can take comfort in knowing that their behavior is more about them than about you.
2. **Work on your timing.** Be aware of the times and situations when your boss tends to be more approachable. They may be less perturbed by negative news after lunch or on days without management meetings.
3. **Take a break.** Step away for a moment if you feel like you're close to losing

your composure. Walk around the block or make plans for lunch. Meditate for a few minutes or listen to music.

4. **Document your actions.** If your boss tends to rewrite history to their advantage, put your agreements down in writing. Create a paper trail with email and other evidence that you can refer to when there's a conflict.

5. **Talk with HR.** If you think it would be helpful, consult HR or a colleague that you trust. Be tactful and discreet so your boss won't think you're going over their head.

6. **Update your resume.** Start exploring other opportunities. You may find a more fulfilling position or just feel more secure by lining up additional options.

7. **Think positive.** However long you stay on the job, try to be upbeat. **A cheerful outlook will reduce your stress and help you to be more productive.**

Steps to Take with Your Boss:

1. **Look for patterns.** Can you spot the triggers behind your boss's behavior? Maybe they expect you to respond immediately to their emails or they act grumpier when deadlines approach. If you can anticipate stressful times, you'll be able to plan for them.

2. **Ask questions.** Clarify priorities and expectations. Let your boss know that you care about your work and want to cooperate.

3. **Focus on content.** Try to distinguish between what your boss is saying and how they say it. Look for the kernel of truth in their feedback even if you think they're exaggerating. Be open to their worthwhile ideas even if it creates extra

tasks for you.

4. **Empathize and validate.** Look for ways to be supportive while you're having conflicts. Let your boss know that you realize the pressures they're under. **You can listen attentively and acknowledge their emotions without having to agree with their choices.**

5. **Express appreciation.** While you're dealing with their unpredictability, remember what you like about your boss. Demonstrating some sincere gratitude and kindness could create a more positive foundation for your interactions.

You may find a satisfactory way to deal with your boss or you may decide to move on. Either way, the more you understand their behavior, the more effective you can be at doing your job and taking care of yourself.