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DO YOU THINK YOU'RE SMARTER THAN YOUR SUPERVISOR? BEING A KNOW-IT-ALL CAN CAUSE CAREER CHAOS

WHAT THE BOSS BELIEVES:

Catherine Smithson is an executive coach in corporate change and leadership, and director of Being Human.

"Very dynamic people are brought up to be questioning and challenging and to think for themselves, which are all positive qualities – unless a person isn't aware of their impact on others.

"My first coaching assignment was with a young, bright, ambitious executive, who'd been sent to coaching by her manager. During her performance review he'd said to her, 'You should get a five out of five, but I'm marking you down to a three and a half because of your smartypants attitude. You don't tolerate fools, you're sarcastic, you belittle people, you're always the first with a cutting comment and you're making enemies in this organisation.'

"A mistake many intellectually brilliant people make is that they think the best idea or argument always wins, but that's not always the case. It's often the person who a manager trusts, who listens and has a positive can-do attitude that gets noticed. Work isn't a battle of the brains; it's also about having trusting relationships.



"Employees who can't see the big picture also frustrate managers. As a boss myself, I might be dealing with a whole lot of issues and a colleague who says 'Well, it's obvious what the answer is' can get under your skin. You think, 'If it was that simple, I'd do it. Do you really think I'm that stupid?'

"Some bosses want feedback from employees but the delivery is very important. If you just want to show off with a cheeky one-liner, you're probably going to have a counterproductive discussion.

"Doing it in a constructive way means picking the right time and place, using open language and phrases that are positive. Say things like 'Would you be interested in a discussion about ...?' or 'I'd really like to help you with that' rather than what your boss 'should' or 'must' do.

"If you tend to think you know more than the boss, get coaching from a co-worker who is known for their diplomacy. Really smart people have a quiet confidence and think before they speak."

WHAT THE EMPLOYEE EXPECTS:

Angela David is the principal of business psychology consultancy YSC Australia.

"Every single person who comes through my door, whether they love their boss or not, still has things they'd like to see them do differently.

"In a hierarchical world, we expect our bosses to be better than us, but that's not necessarily the reality. Some people have greater intellectual capability than their manager and they will get frustrated if their supervisor doesn't 'get it' as quickly as they do.

"Successful people tend to be really good at two or three things, but poor to average at everything else. So a great department head should say, 'I've hired you because this isn't my forte but it is yours.'

"Unfortunately, most managers won't be so upfront. In fact, some might even feel threatened by your strengths, while others may not actually recognise them or know how to harness them. The most obvious and significant danger is that the best solutions aren't implemented because



communication isn't flowing. Employees can feel frustrated, like they're not contributing at the level they could be; that's one of the biggest reasons for staff turnover – people generally leave managers, not companies.

"Don't underestimate how much you can learn from a bad boss. Recognise what your manager can offer in terms of experience, while simultaneously learning what *not* to do. No matter how intelligent you are, judgement takes time to develop. And you have to respect your manager by putting in the hard yards to get where they are.

"Other than leaving their employment, self-insight is the best way to handle this situation. If a boss is threatened by you, be sensitive; no-one likes a cocksure colleague, so use your emotional intelligence to judge when it's appropriate to speak up, and when things are best left unsaid."

– Erica Holburn

BOSS FROM HELL

"I was 19 when I got my first job as a receptionist in a design firm and thought it would be awesome – until I met my boss. Swearing and name-calling were daily events. The biggest insult was when my grandfather died and he said to another employee, 'What does she want time off for now? He's already dead.' I lasted nine months but wish I'd left sooner." Anna, 29, traveller



If you have a boss – or colleague – from hell story, we'd love to hear from you. Tell us all about it by visiting www.marieclaire.com.au/bossfromhell.

