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# How to Be the Boss (Without Firing Yours)

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**W**hen you were a kid, did you ever put your hands on your hips and furiously yell, “YOU’RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME!”

I did.

Now, as a fully formed grownup in the world of work, do you ever wish you could yell it again?

If you’re like many of my clients, you do. One told me after he gets a disagreeable request from his boss, he actually imagines stamping his feet in protest, “channeling my inner 7-year-old.”

As kids, the person bossing us might have been the true boss of us (especially if it was Mom, Dad or Grandma with the switch). But today, too many people believe that the boss in their office is the boss of them. They believe what the organization chart says.

But I believe differently.

**I believe you are the boss of you.**

But only if you give yourself the job.

## WHY YOU MUST BE THE BOSS OF YOU, NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO OR WHERE YOU WORK

Admittedly, there’s a lot of benefit in letting someone else be the boss.

- *It’s easier to take direction from others.*
- *It’s easier to let someone else make hard choices.*
- *It’s simpler not to figure out the “why” and just move ahead with the “what.”*
- *It’s safer not to be held responsible when things go wrong.*
- *It’s more fun to criticize after the fact than to do the work to figure out what should be done in the first place.*

But in today’s world of work, deferring “boss-dom” to someone else carries a great deal of risk:

- *Risk of wasting time doing things that you know from experience won’t work.*
- *Risk of investing energy in things that aren’t in your superpower space, don’t belong on your plate, and distract you from doing your best work.*
- *Risk of losing confidence when badly laid plans go bad.*
- *Risk of losing money when your raises, bonuses and promotions are only influenced by someone else’s words.*
- *Risk of contradicting your own values and making you feel frustrated, confused, or even worthless.*
- *Risk of losing control over your long-term career, time and efforts.*

## So how can you minimize those risks?

Some people mistakenly think the only way is to quit their job and start their own business. But that’s not for everyone, and takes careful planning and patience to be successful.

Others think hope is a strategy, as in “I hope my boss gets transferred / promoted / fired / an embarrassing skin disorder.”

**The ONLY way to minimize the risks—no matter what your role or your company—is to become the boss of you.**

## HOW TO BE THE BOSS OF YOU: THREE STRATEGIES TO USE NOW

*But how do I be the boss of me? What about my real boss?*

Just because you have a boss on paper (or perhaps several given our matrix-mapped organizations) doesn’t mean you can’t be the boss of you. In fact, great bosses value people who are actively taking action and assuming personal responsibility like a boss.

And if you have a bad boss, your life at work can instantly improve when you start focusing on being

the boss of you. Here are three ways to get started.

### 1. Know who you are and who you aren't.

Great bosses are super clear on their superpowers and where they add value. You can have this same clarity.

To really know who you are and what is unique, special and amazing about you, take time to figure out:

- *What is your vision for your career—and for your life?*
- *What are your talents, skills and abilities?*
- *Which of those talents and skills do you love to use and which would you prefer to never use again?*

Knowing these things serves as a guidepost for the kind of boss you want to be, the kind of value you bring, and most importantly, the kinds of projects/people/situations where you should steer clear.

### 2. Know what's most important—and what's not.

In my work with individuals and teams in large organizations, I see too many people trying to do it all and please everyone. That's flirtin' with disaster.

I'm all for hard, focused work on the right things. But scattered, distracted work on too many things is creating a corporate crisis.

**Falsely believing that everything is important is creating overwhelm, distraction, stress and errors.** It's also masking the true need for talent in the workplace, since leaders can't see the depth of holes in their team when work gets done miraculously because you're sucking up both the urgent and the trivial.

Don't be misguided and think that your heroics will be rewarded. The heroic thing to do is to get clear on what's really important at work—to you and to your organization. Then, start investing your time and energy accordingly.

To get there, ask:

- *What do I value at work?*

- *What does my organization value? (Not sure? Look at what behaviors it rewards.)*
- *Where do the two of those intersect?*

When you become the boss of you, you can use this data to make better decisions, to say no appropriately, and to explain your decision process to others. This is also how great bosses start conversations about how to create long-lasting change at work.

### 3. Know you always have a choice.

Did you realize that you have a choice whether you'll show up for work each day? A choice as to whether you'll answer a question posed to you? A choice about what's on your to-do list?

To be the boss of you, you must recognize that everything you do, say and think is a choice. You control those things.

And each choice has a consequence:

- *The consequence of not showing up for work may be getting fired—or someone realizing how much you're needed.*
- *The consequence of not answering a question may be making the asker angry—or allowing the asker to rethink it.*
- *The consequence of not letting everything stay on your to-do list might be letting things go undone—which may be a problem, or exactly what needs to happen.*

### Start looking at everything you're doing as a choice—a choice you, as the boss of you, control.

So, if your manager gives you an unpleasant assignment, executing on it is a choice. Re-negotiating the unpleasant parts about it is a choice. Not doing it is a choice, too. All have different consequences.

When you're the boss of you, you make the right, sometimes hard, choices, based on who you are and what's most important to you. But in the end, the choices are yours. And that's something to be proud of. ●

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