

BAD BOSSES RUIN LIVES

The Building Blocks for
Being a Great Boss



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Welcome to this document that contains the Introduction chapter from our book titled *Bad Bosses Ruin Lives: The Building Blocks to Being a Great Boss*. We're sharing it to give you a glimpse into the book, and into this important topic. We hope you find it helpful, and that it inspires you to continue or begin your journey for being a great boss.

Introduction

The majority of bosses do not wake up in the morning and say to themselves, "Today is a great day to ruin my people's lives." And yet time after time, person after person, that is exactly what is happening, with well-intentioned bosses getting it wrong. Instead of being the great boss they want and need to be, they are doing the opposite of what they set out to do – making bad decisions, taking bad actions, and causing bad impacts.

But this isn't new, we've heard for years that bad bosses are rampant in the workplace. How people leave bosses and not companies (57%¹ of people surveyed said they left their company because of their boss). How people don't trust their bosses (64%² of people surveyed said that they'd trust a robot more than they'd trust their boss). And how a bad boss can drive disengagement (managers account for at least 70%³ of the variance in employee engagement scores). We laugh at these bad bosses, point fingers at them, blame them, and even come up with nasty names to call them. But where has that gotten us? Nowhere, as we still have a very real problem! In fact, almost 100% of the people who participated in the survey we conducted for this book said that they've had a bad boss.

That's because for many of us, we don't even know that we have these traits, or we're embarrassed of them. This needs to change. If we're ever going to rid the world of bad bosses, we need to change how we look at them, how we look at ourselves, and what we do about it. We need to accept the fact that there are bad boss traits in all of us, *not just the few*. Bad boss traits are not taboo to discuss, rather we need to understand them so that we can accept those that apply to us, *instead of denying that they exist*. And, equip ourselves with new skills so we're able to tackle our bad boss traits, *instead of trying to be a great boss using bad boss techniques and approaches*. We need to walk into them and not away from them!

By doing this, we're set up to deal with all that comes our way, good and bad, easy or hard, ready to wake up in the morning and say to ourselves, "**Today is the day that I can enrich my people's lives.**"

¹ DDI study, 2019.

² Oracle and Future Workplace study, 2020.

³ Gallup, *State of the American Manager*, 2015.

Why do we have bad bosses?

We don't set out to be a bad boss. It often creeps in quite slowly. We have a bad day, a challenging project, a difficult employee, or possibly even a bad boss ourselves. And then a sinking feeling hits you ... have you become the bad boss that you had always dreaded?

Sound familiar? I'd be surprised if it didn't. We believe it's happening because of a lack of three things – awareness, acceptance, and action – all of which we'll be tackling throughout the book.

- **Awareness** – We all have blind spots, not being aware of the big and little things that we say and do that cause us to be a bad boss.

How we'll tackle this: In Part 1 we name them, sharing the 10 types of bad bosses, and the traits associated with them so you can understand exactly what they are.

- **Acceptance** – We're not looking in the mirror, accepting the bad boss traits we have so that we can take ownership and responsibility for them.

How we'll tackle this: We provide tools to help you understand what your bad boss traits are, and the areas you need to focus on to change, adapt, and develop.

- **Action** – We're not taking the right actions, or leveraging the right knowledge, skills, and tools to become great and overcome our bad boss traits.

How we'll tackle this: In Part 2 we provide you with the Great Boss Building Block™ model, containing 14 building blocks to help you develop your great boss skills.

There's a big gap in bad boss acceptance

For this book, we ran two surveys, both asking questions regarding the 10 types of bad bosses you'll learn more about in this book. One survey asked about *bosses you've had*, and one asked about *you as a boss*.

Some of the results were fairly consistent, with **99.6% of respondents saying that they've had a bad boss**, and **80% saying that they have been a bad boss**. That was a good start, admitting that bad bosses do exist, and people admitting that they may have some of these traits.

But when it comes to *what type* of bad boss people think they are, that's where it got surprising. For example, for the Unappreciator, 81% said that they've *had* this kind of bad boss, however **only 14%** said they've *been* this kind of bad boss. For the Avoider, 80% said that they've *had* this kind of bad boss, however **only 15%** said they've *been* this kind of bad boss. And for the Coercer, 72% said that they've *had* this kind of bad boss, however **only 8%** said they've *been* this kind of bad boss. This gap highlights that there's more work we all need to do to accept and then action these bad boss traits. While the theory of a bad boss exists, there's more work to be done to properly identify those types of bosses in our day-to-day to meet our employees' ever-changing needs. Luckily, this book will help you on that journey!

Myths and misconceptions

Another reason we have so many bad bosses is because of the myths and misconceptions that exist. Here are seven that we'll be busting throughout the book, highlighting them so that you and others don't repeat them yourself.

1. **All bad bosses know that they're bad bosses** – I'm absolutely sure that if we went to the bosses of those we surveyed, the majority would be shocked to hear that their employees thought they were a bad boss. But mathematically that can't be right. We know that bad bosses exist. This is why it's even more important for you, as a boss, to be self-aware, understanding why, when, and how you may take on bad boss traits, and then overcome them to take actions to be a great one.
2. **You're either a bad, good, or great boss** – When it comes to being a boss, it is never either/or, all, or nothing. We all have a mix of traits, some bad, some good, and some great. The reality is that there are shades of gray. They come and go based on the situation, the person, and even what's happening in our lives. The key is understanding what they are, and how you can deal with and improve them.
3. **Everyone wants the same things from their boss** – If all our people were the same, life would be so easy, and being a great boss would be easy. We'd have one set of instructions to learn, and use them over and over again with our people. But that's not how it is. Your people all want and need different things from you, and for this reason, you need to understand and adapt so that we can be a great boss to each and every one of them, whatever that looks like.
4. **There are only a few skills you need to learn to be a great boss** – Just like there is not one set of instructions, there aren't one, two, or three skills to learn, and bang, you're a great boss. If only! There are a wide variety of skills you need to learn so that you can handle all that your people, your business, and the world throw at you.
5. **Once you get it right it's smooth sailing** – Wouldn't it be great if once you finished this book, or any book, or took a course, and presto, you had what it took to be a great boss? It would, but it isn't! And that's because being a great boss requires introspection and feedback, it requires commitment and devotion, it is not simple and it is not easy. And to make it even more challenging, just when you think you've mastered something, things change, and what worked one day in one situation and with one person, may not work the next day. If you want to be a great, or at least a good boss, you need to practice, and at the same time adopt a flexible and fluid attitude and approach, setting you up to ride the waves and keep on sailing.
6. **You get promoted because you're a great boss** – Wrong, you get promoted to be a boss because you were able to do your previous job well. And though this can help you teach your people all that you've learned, it's not automatically going to make you a great boss. In fact, as a new boss, you're going to have to let go of being the person who knew everything, the person who had all the answers, and the person who focused on your performance. You'll need to do things very differently going forward. As Ryan Hawk says

in his book *Welcome to Management*, “**Being a great manager has nothing to do with how well you performed in your old job.**”

7. **Bad bosses don't ruin lives** – Not every bad boss ruins lives, for as we've said, there are different degrees and levels of bad bosses. But we've heard the stories, we've had it happen to us personally, and we can say without hesitation that there are definitely bad bosses who are indeed ruining lives. They are having such a profound impact on how they're making their people feel at work that they can't walk away from it, shake it, or wash it off, and they bring it home. Home to their family, their friends, and their lives. As a boss, we know this is the last thing you want to do. That's why we are on this mission to set you up for success, being a great boss who sends your people home after a rewarding day at work to have a great day and a great life.

“The truth will set you free. But first, it will piss you off!” — Gloria Steinem

The changing role of a boss

New bad bosses get created because, quite frankly, the role keeps changing, making it harder and harder for us to be a great boss. So just when you think you've figured it out, another change, challenge, or requirement comes your way! Just look around you. Your workforce is different, more diverse than ever with five generations working side by side, the workplace is different, with new work arrangements and AI impacting how and where work gets done, and expectations from our business, customers, and people are different as well. Add it all up, and being a boss is more challenging than ever!

As Josh Bersin and Janet Mertens explain in *The Definition Guide to Leadership Development: Irresistible Leadership*, “Rather than focusing on ‘execution first’ management tools and traditional leadership models, post-industrial leaders practice what we call ‘human-centered leadership.’ In the Industrial Age, we relied on management science, directed leadership, and top-down execution to thrive. In this new era, we need leaders who understand the people issues in their organizations, creating execution through inspiration, mission, purpose, collaboration, learning, and of course accountability. Instead of people being a ‘means of production,’ people ‘are the product.’ Whether you are developing software, delivering healthcare, or producing food or drugs for sale, the entire customer experience is dependent on people. Every company, in a sense, is now in the people business.”

“The time has come for business to start thinking of people as human beings and not resources; shifting from maximizing profits and profitability to focusing on how we can help people achieve their highest potential and purpose – which will naturally, positively impact results.” — Clare Edwards, *BrainSmart People Development*

The impact and shadow you cast

So why does it matter? Why should we put in all of this blood, sweat, and tears into being a great boss? Is it really going to make a difference? The simple answer is yes. Throughout the book, we'll be sharing with you what happens when you get it right and when you get it wrong. From factors that impact your business such as productivity, profit, engagement, and retention, to factors that impact your people such as their wellbeing, morale, and happiness, you'll see that there's no denying it ... being a great boss can help your business and people thrive, and on the flip side, being a bad boss can damage and destroy them.

The shadow you cast

Another way of describing the impact you have on your people is as your “shadow,” which as the name suggests, relates to the influence, good or bad, that you have on your people. Goldman Sachs coined the phrase “Leadership Shadow,” which is made up of four things⁴:

1. **What you say** – Your written and spoken words, your non-verbal cues, and even the things you say, repeat, or emphasize.
2. **How you act** – Your positive and negative behaviors and actions, role modeling to your people what you expect of them.
3. **What you prioritize** – What you value, focus on, what you spend time on, who you interact with, and your routines.
4. **How you measure** – What you decide to reward, recognize, and what you hold your team accountable for.

Shadows are often unnoticed, as you may not even realize that you're casting one. It's like when you see your child saying or doing something that reminds you of yourself. Thinking, “Do I really say that?” or “Do I really do that?” And then it hits you that yes, that's you, and they're only mimicking what they've learned by watching you. This is yet another reason for this book, to help you clearly see your shadow, your impact, and then actively cast it in the direction and way you intend to.

"All leaders cast a shadow. The question is whether yours is blocking the sun, or inspiring others with its silhouette to strive for more." — Brad Smith, President Marshall University, Former CEO of Intuit

Employee engagement

We can't talk about impact without talking about employee engagement, something we'll be mentioning throughout the book. And just to be sure that you're familiar and comfortable with this term, we thought we'd define it upfront. Gallup defines engaged employees as those who are

⁴ TFCG blog, Leadership Shadow #235.

“involved in and enthusiastic about their work and workplace.” In my book *Build it: The Rebel Playbook for Employee Engagement* we take this definition to the next level, defining an engaged employee as someone who:

1. **Understands and believes in the direction the organization is going** so that they feel a part of something bigger than themselves.
2. **Understands how their role affects and contributes** to the organization’s purpose, mission, and objectives.
3. **Genuinely wants the organization to succeed** and feel shared success with the organization.
4. **Believes that their company, and their boss, genuinely cares** about and supports them.

Study after study has shown the positive impact that employee engagement can have with respect to several critical factors. Whether it’s through improved sales, profit, customer service, or the wellbeing of your people, getting it right can be the difference between your company succeeding or failing. And as a boss, you have an important role to play when it comes to employee engagement, as great bosses create an environment and lead in a way that can drive high engagement. In fact, according to one study⁵, **there is a 70% variance in employee engagement scores based on a boss**. That means that your company can do everything right, but if you as a boss don’t do your part in driving engagement, then it just won’t happen!

Intent versus impact

And finally, another important aspect of impact is understanding the difference between intent and impact. Put simply, **intent is what we mean to say or do**, so what we’re trying to achieve. And **impact is what we actually achieve**, so how it’s received. And often, the effect, the impact, does not always match the intent.

It’s critical to understand this in our quest to be a great boss, as this often gets in the way. For example, just the other day in a workshop I was asked about using humor in a particular situation. My response was “It depends.” If the intent is to use humor in a positive way, one that will deepen understanding and your overall relationship with this person, then you need to be aware of the potential negative impact of it as well. Will it come across as insensitive or insensitive? Will it escalate the problem? Or will your people see it as a breath of fresh air, delighted that you used humor to help in a difficult situation? The key, and something we’ll talk about throughout the book, is to understand your people so that you can align intent and impact, getting it right for you and for them.

⁵ Gallup, *State of the American Manager*, 2015.

Bad boss stress disorder

One of the things we heard over and over again when interviewing people for this book was the damage that a bad boss had on them. And not just damage that lasted a day or a week, but damage that lasted months and even years. After speaking to these people, we came up with the term to describe this, calling it the “bad boss stress disorder.” And like any other stress disorder, they can increase the risk of mental health problems and cardiovascular disease.

We share this not to point fingers, but to raise awareness. Awareness of the profound impact that a boss can have on their people, even the strongest of them.

How to use this book

This book is all about you, giving you what you need to **banish your bad boss traits**, or at least get them under control, and **develop some new great boss traits**. It's intended as a safe book, one where there is no judgment, but where you know that we're alongside you, guiding and helping you on your journey. It's also flexible, available when and how you need it to be, letting you dip in and out as you face a challenge and/or a new situation. And it's honest, with us sharing with you stories of when we and others haven't gotten it right so that you can learn from these lessons. As we've said a few times already, each and every one of us has or will be a bad boss from time to time. Even as we interviewed our thought leaders, every one shared at least one story of when they were a bad boss as well.

The book is divided into two parts, for as we mentioned, we want to look at and address the two sides of being a boss - a bad one and a great one.

- **Part 1: Types of Bad Bosses** – This part focuses on the 10 types of bad bosses. In it we share some of the traps you may fall into that lead you to these actions and behaviors, the consequences of these behaviors, and then finally, a few things for you to mull over to get you ready for the next part.
- **Part 2: Great Boss Building Blocks** – This part shares our Great Boss Building Block™ model, which consists of 14 different but related building blocks that help you be a great boss. You'll see that this part is twice as long as the first part, as this book is focused on giving you the tools to be great, not belaboring or focusing on being a bad boss.

Final challenges

To set you up for success, let us encourage and challenge you to do four things as you read this book, getting the most from it and for you:

1. **Leave your ego at the door** – Acceptance and change is never going to be easy. But it will be impossible if you don't open the door to it, you don't "leave your ego at the door" as the expression goes. Be willing and open to new ideas, ways, and challenges that we will be

presenting. See them as opportunities and not as punishments for how you may have acted in the past.

2. **Lean into your greatness** – You're also going to need to lean into the change, leaning into your greatness. This means that as you go through the book you need to not only open the door to new ideas, but commit fully to them, embrace them, and give them a go. If they work, great, if they don't, lean into another idea or another until you find what works for you and your people.
3. **Embrace the journey** – If it was easy to be a great boss we'd all be one. So remind yourself that it's a journey, and embrace it. Celebrate achievements, learn from stepbacks, and accept that often it's going to be progress over perfection. You have 14 building blocks to draw from, so use them to build and rebuild as you need throughout your journey, one that hopefully you can enjoy and your people and company can benefit from.
4. **Keep the end in mind** – A great boss puts their team's interest ahead of their own, and not the other way around. They do the hard things because they're the right things to do. They look inward to see how they can do their best for their people, and outward to see how their people can be their best for themselves and their company. That's what makes a great boss.

So let me ask you, are you ready to begin your journey to be a great boss? Let's go!

For More Information

We hope you've found this excerpt from our book interesting and helpful. Here are two ways you can learn more on this important topic:

- **Grab a copy of our book** – If you'd like to learn more about the 10 types of bad bosses as well as the Great Boss Building Block Model™, please check out our book titled ***Bad Bosses Ruin Lives: The Building Blocks for Being a Great Boss***.
- **Take the free and confidential Boss Trait Assessment** – If you're a boss (leader, manager, etc.,) and want to better identify and/or understand the traits you have as a boss (good, bad, and great!), we've created a free and confidential online assessment tool. You will be presented with a series of questions that relate to how you act and behave as a boss. Once answered, you'll receive a free personalized assessment of how you scored against the 10 types of bad bosses covered in the book, and areas you can work on to improve using the Great Boss Building Block Model™.

You can find the tool at: www.debcohr.com/bosses

About the authors

Debra Corey is a highly experienced and award-winning HR consultant, world-class speaker, and six-time best-selling author who has been named as one of the top 101 global employee engagement influencers multiple times. After over 20 years working for global companies, she now 'pays it forward' by inspiring and helping organizations and leaders develop and deliver people and culture strategies and initiatives in a rebellious way, pushing the boundaries and challenging the status quo to truly drive employee engagement and business performance.

Ken Corey is a seasoned Engineering Leader and a trailblazer in fostering innovative solutions, most recently exemplified in his role as a Senior Engineering Manager at Curve. With a rich career spanning over three decades, Ken has been at the forefront of cultivating high-performance teams, driving complex project deliveries and advancing cutting-edge engineering practices in companies ranging from startups to large enterprises. His leadership ethos is rooted deeply in people development, always striving to propel his team members' careers to new heights while ensuring utmost customer satisfaction.

