



Five Reasons To Fire Your Boss

Even the most loyal employee must occasionally look out for #1

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IN "RECRUITING 101," NEW HEADHUNTERS learn that employees who have consistently been more loyal to themselves than their organizations over the years are generally not the best candidates. It seems a contradiction that people who are trained to surgically remove employees are also trained to look askew at those who have made more than a few of these moves. This is because loyalty is actually very important to the recruiting process. Client employers like to know about what efforts a candidate has made to fit in; how a person feels about loyalty to their team and company does indeed matter when forecasting a "fit."

And yet, there are indeed situations in which your best option can only be to leave your employer. Here are five classic scenarios in which this can occur, and my recommendations on how to deal with them if they show up in your life.

Reason #1: The Bad Boss

John could feel it coming. Another ranting and raving review of the poor progress on his development project. As the team began to assemble in the meeting room, he looked over the worn faces of his colleagues. Their boss, the Senior Director of Process Development, was known to be the most critical and difficult-to-work-with person in the company. Despite the long hours and many successes that they've had along the way, he was never satisfied. John had seen many of his co-workers lose their excitement in the work, and if he stayed much longer in this company, he felt that he too would become a victim of this terrible supervisor.

It's easy to understand why people would want to stay with a good boss. After all, there is nothing better to help make one's work life enjoyable. Why some people have a hard time leaving a bad boss is much more difficult to understand. Other employers often know who these bad bosses are and will understand and appreciate your desire to make a move if you find yourself caught in this trap.

Reason #2: Reaching the Plateau

Despite the many successes she had seen in this job and her love for the science, Anne felt that it was like seeing *Gone With The Wind* for the 14th time. There was absolutely no adventure left. After six years of the same projects, and the same daily grind, she felt ready to go to sleep on the job. She had approached her boss and the

Human Resources department several times during the last three years to find some new way in which her skills could serve the company. Their answer had been to promote her to Principal Scientist, which meant a bump in pay. But the job, and the plateau she was on, seemed to be the same despite the additional dollars in her paycheck. She had to find a way to achieve job happiness once again, as it appeared that her boss had no intention of training someone else to do her job.

It is not money that is at the root of most job changes. Instead, recruiters typically hear that the job has "lost its challenge," or that a candidate is seeking to "break free of a rut." People who have spent years developing a specific area of expertise find that they need to be learning something new throughout each stage of their career. When the learning process slows and the job becomes more and more repetitive, trouble begins. If you've found yourself on this plateau recently, looking at tasks that offer only the opportunity for more of the same, you would be smart to consider making a job change before your senses become permanently dulled.

Reason #3: White Shirts vs. Birkenstocks

George felt a sense of excitement when they announced the new CEO. "Now we are really going to take off," he thought to himself. "This woman is from Merck. She'll know exactly what it will take to get the company off the ground." While some of the changes felt quite promising, what George didn't expect was the corporate culture clash that resulted. He and many others had enjoyed the early days of the company and the casual approach to doing business. Long hours in jeans had turned into "9 to 5" in a shirt and tie. On top of that, a creeping bureaucracy had set in. One day he found himself needing three signatures to order reagents. At that moment, he knew that he had to get back to a company culture in which he would be comfortable.

A new boss from outside the firm can bring a "big company" feel to firms that have only 100 or 200 employees. When this clash of "white shirts" managers and "Birkenstocks" employees occurs, there is almost no middle ground. You feel

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comfortable on one side or the other of this division and it may not be until you change companies that you can regain your happiness on the job.

Reason #4: Politics Run Amok

Jane loved her job. She was in an exciting biotech company with more than a dozen products in the pipeline and a hot platform technology. She couldn't imagine a better situation for a business development person with a love of deal-making. The company's niche was hot right now, and everyone wanted a shot at licensing their delivery technology. Sadly, her boss had played politics with the board and had ended up on the wrong side of the fence—in a

new position with far less responsibility. The new COO had scheduled a meeting with her to question her loyalties, and she felt terrible to be labeled simply by her previous association. In fact, Jane was concerned that she could be considered the next "designated scapegoat."

Every firm has some degree of company politics. In this example, although Jane wasn't a willing participant in her boss's gamesmanship with the board of directors, she was close enough to it to have been left with an image that she doesn't think will suit her well for future growth. It's time for her to get into a new company and start again with a fresh reputation.

Reason #5: Information As Power

Somesh's boss was famous for not disclosing information to those beneath him, and the project meeting had deteriorated to rumors as a result. Talk of possible layoffs and job duplication took precedence over regulatory hurdles. Somesh could sense the group dividing between those who were going to "hang in there" and pray for their job or a severance package, and those who—like him—would take the proactive approach and get out before it all hit the fan. The boss could have defused the whole matter, but instead chose to go on about how it was most important to get the project moved along successfully. Somesh made a mental note to touch up his résumé that evening.

Some people harbor information because to them it represents power, and to share it means weakening their position. If you are working for a person like this, you are constantly in the dark—which makes it impossible to 'steer' through important career decisions.

Many years of interviewing successful scientists, engineers and managers has taught me that most employees will at some time face a similar situation to those I've described. What determines that person's eventual level of success is generally how proactive the candidate is when making the decision to leave. It is far better to recognize these situations in advance than to wait for an untenable situation to deteriorate and to be kicked out of the nest.

Thousands of people affected by scenarios like these wait until the situation worsens before drafting a résumé. This is like suspecting that you have termites in your home because you see sawdust everywhere, but waiting until the roof falls in on you one night before calling the exterminator.

If you are struggling with career problems forced on you by circumstances such as those I've described, take control of your career. Fire that boss! ■