

Caution: Warning signs of a bad boss

No one wants to work with a bad boss, and being unhappy at work can have a huge impact on your morale, productivity, and career fulfilment. In fact, 60% of job seekers say they've left a job because of a bad boss, while 25% have declined a potential role for the same reason.

Here are five questions from career coach Leah Lambart to work out if your potential boss is a good one.

Bad boss or bad fit?

Rather than labelling a prospective boss as 'bad' or 'good', Career Coach and Founder of [Relaunch Me](#) Leah Lambart, says it's helpful to understand the qualities, attributes and communication style that get the best out of you in the workplace.

"For example, are you seeking a supportive, collaborative, and nurturing manager who will guide, coach and develop you, and communicate on a regular basis?" Lambart asks. "Or are you seeking a go-getter, action-oriented manager with a direct communication style who leaves you to get on with things and work more independently?"

The first step in understanding [what you need from a manager](#) is to consider what type of leadership and communication style works best for you.

Know your values before deciding on the role

Starting a job search is the perfect time to reassess your personal values. Working for someone whose values align with yours will greatly increase your chance of feeling fulfilled in the workplace.

These may include intrinsic values like doing work that helps people, working as part of a collaborative team or doing work that leads to growth and progression. Extrinsic

values may include high income, status, work-life balance or job security.

“Our values are like a compass or a guiding light when it comes to finding fulfilling work” says Lambart. “Whilst many of us may be able to set aside our personal values in the short-term, working for an organisation or boss where values are not aligned will often lead to disharmony, resentment and a lack of fulfilment in the long-term”.

A way of testing value alignment during the recruitment process is asking for examples of where those shared values have been ‘lived’ day-to-day in the workplace.

Warning signs

Before you apply for, interview for, or accept a new position, reflect on the attribute and qualities of past managers that you’ve admired.

“Explore what it was about previous managers that worked best for you and whether this same leadership and communication style would still suit you best,” says Lambart. During the recruitment process, you may be asked ‘What do you look for in a manager?’ so doing some of this work upfront will also ensure you’re providing a considered response.

Questions to ask to avoid a bad boss

It’s important to remember you don’t need to be friends with your boss, but it certainly helps to have a respectful and compatible relationship. Here are five questions you could ask a potential boss during the hiring process:

- 1. What key qualities do you look for in a member of your team?**

This is a great way to test whether your personal attributes match what the hiring manager would deem to be successful qualities.

- 2. Can you help me understand what’s important in this role, beyond relevant experience and technical skills?**

Listen to see if your potential boss highlights particular personal attributes or values required to be successful in the role.

- 3. How would you describe your style of communication?**

Ask this to gauge if your potential manager is able to articulate their communication style and whether this communication style works for you. For example, will they be fair and firm when providing feedback or softer in their approach.

4. How important is the career progression of your team members?

Ask this to see if your potential boss understands the career goals of their direct reports and whether the manager has supported further learning and development opportunities.

5. How would your employees describe your leadership style?

Again, this question identifies whether the manager can [articulate their own leadership style](#) and clarify whether this style will work for you.

Having a bad boss, or a boss who's a bad fit for you can have a major impact on your happiness and performance at work. Knowing your values and asking simple questions that target potential warning signs before you accept the job can ensure a healthy working relationship with your new boss.

Source: Independent research conducted by Nature of behalf of SEEK, interviewing 4800 Australians annually. Published April 2024.

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