

## Why Tolerate Dud Managers?

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Look around your place of work and identify a manager who is clearly a dud. It is not hard to spot these individuals. Of course, you can find a spectrum of problem managers, from mildly annoying to completely abusive. These managers take advantage of people, work at cross purposes to their true objectives, destroy trust, beat down people, obliterate the culture, and habitually turn in poor or even disastrous performances. The simple question for this article is why they are allowed to continue.

Bosses have numerous reasons for leaving an incumbent dud manager in power. Below is a listing of some of the more common reasons. This is a representative list, and it is not an exhaustive one.

1. Nepotism in its various forms is one cause. If the boss' son is a jerk, he will cause a lot of damage and still (usually) keep his job. Any kind of "fair haired" manager who has favor with the decision makers can remain employed while being a dud.
2. The halo effect can be in play if a manager had a wonderful opportunity and really did a great job when conditions were ideal. In a more challenging atmosphere, the manager could struggle, but the reputation from an earlier time seems to carry through.
3. If the manager's boss is just weak or fails to hold the manager accountable, then the dud can remain in power for years with no corrections. In this case, you have a dud working for a dud of a different kind.
4. There may be no other candidate who is trained or has the desire to take the position. I recall one area that was particularly difficult for any manager. The environment had been abused for so long that the people were hardened and would "eat up" even excellent managers brought in to try to change the culture.
5. The dud manager may be a Subject Matter Expert (SME) who is in position because he is the only one who knows the correct procedures.
6. The manager may be new and under extreme pressure from above to perform, so the abuse seems like the only way to manage. He or she does not realize this approach is really dysfunctional in the long term.

These are a few examples of why an incumbent manager who is not doing well may be allowed to sap the vital life force out of the workers. Let's take a look at some ways to deal with this situation if you have a dud manager.

1. Some managers can be reformed and trained into being enlightened managers. This process takes good mentoring and patience from above. It is rare to actually change the stripes of a manager in place, but it can be done for some small percentage of the dud managers. Training and coaching are the answers.
2. Special assignments can help get this individual out of the environment long enough to create a transition to a new leader. The special assignment would be as an individual contributor rather than a leader of people.
3. Honest appraisal. Here, the senior manager needs to have the courage to let the dud manager know he is not cutting it. Often the dud realizes things are not going well but does not have the fortitude to change behaviors without a kick in the pants. He may not realize there are more productive alternatives.
4. Job rotation. Generally, it is not a wise idea to move problem managers around because they can contaminate other areas that were performing well. Occasionally a change of scene and the ability to work with a different senior leader can bring the manager around to perform better.
5. Removal is always an option. This tactic has a double benefit. First, the whole population breathes a sigh of relief and prays for a better manager coming in. Second, the actual performance of the unit will be significantly higher as a result.

Do not let a dud manager stay in an assignment. He or she is not going to improve over time. In fact, conditions will probably worsen. Since the capabilities of managers often follows a kind of "normal distribution," there is always the opportunity to do some helpful pruning on the low end of the scale.



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