

## **Wimpy Bosses**

**by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

I have written about bully bosses a couple of times, but I never addressed the other end of the spectrum - wimpy bosses. While not as obnoxious as a bully boss, the wimpy boss can be exasperating in different ways. Let's look at some of the characteristics of a wimpy boss and follow up with some tips in case you happen to be paired up with one.

I am reminded of the cartoon character "Wimpy" in the Popeye Cartoon,(I know I am dating myself - and as Groucho used to say, "If you're dating yourself, you aren't likely to have many children."). Wimpy was famous for the line, "I would gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." That characteristic of postponing things is one of the hallmarks of a wimpy boss. Regardless of the issue, there are some bosses who do not want to face making a decision, so they ask for more analysis or more time. Eventually people get the message that there isn't going to be a firm answer.

Another trait of a wimpy boss is that the person will not stand up for people who work for him or her. If upper layers of management perceive an individual incorrectly, the wimpy boss is going to be a "yes man" and not challenge the misconception.

Wimpy bosses do not hold firm to decisions made on principle. They bend with the breeze coming from on high and waffle when asked to take a stand on issues involving integrity. They are like chameleons and change colors to blend in with the background.

When a person is abusing other employees, the wimpy boss does not step in with strong action to stop the problem. Instead, problems are allowed to fester and well up because the boss has no strength or backbone.

What can you do if you have a wimpy boss? That is a really good question, because you are not likely to change this person. The weak habits are a form of self preservation, laziness, or just plain being gutless. No amount of coaching is likely to reverse a lifetime of bad habits in this area. If you are reporting to a wimpy boss, the best you can do is document your requests carefully and make sure you copy others, such as senior management or HR in on your requests.

Make sure the need for decisions have a date fixed to them and that a large number of people are aware of the delivery date. If needed, send reminders a reasonable time before the due date.

If you see some signs of strength emerging, reinforce the boss enthusiastically for taking action. It will serve to encourage stronger action in the future.

Lastly, training can help a wimpy boss learn how to handle difficult situations and also make more firm decisions. You may not be in a position to nudge the boss directly to get some training, but there could be indirect ways to let it be known that some additional seasoning would be beneficial. Each organization will have a different political hierarchy that includes not only the wimpy boss but also that person's peers, manager, HR, and the Development Group. As an underling to a wimpy boss, you need to be careful how and when you point out opportunities for improvement.

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