

# What to do if your boss is a bully



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Is your boss a bully? Image: Getty

Australian radio host Ray Hadley has been taken to court over bullying accusations, with a former producer claiming he had been subjected to "inexcusable behaviour".

This morning, Hadley told listeners he was "sad and concerned" over the claims, which were first aired in March this year on Facebook.

And, Hadley said that while his relationship with the staff member "could be volatile", it was more like a "father and son" relationship.

"But I felt that we always got through our ups and downs and had plenty of good times, and I was proud when he asked me to MC his wedding and touched by the comments he made about me and our relationship.

"I'm particularly sad and concerned that it has now come to a legal action, which is now in the hands of my legal advisers."

Navigating a relationship with a boss who you suspect may be a bully is difficult at the best of times, HR expert and founder of Corporate Dojo, Karen Gately told *Yahoo Finance*.

It can lead to psychological and physical stress, and in the worst cases, suicide ideation.

## What should I do if I think I'm being bullied at work?

The first step is to figure out if you're actually being bullied, or just receiving some difficult feedback.

Gately said the bullying accusation can be thrown around very quickly for actions more accurately described as rude or disrespectful.

"[But] bullying is, in the eyes with the law repeated, targeted behavior that has the impact of leaving you feeling intimidated, embarrassed, humiliated," she said.

"Sometimes there'll be isolated instances or from time to time your boss will be far from ideal, they might be a bit gruff, or they might be a bit displeased with an outcome. That's not the same thing as bullying you out in front of their staff, or targeting you through their actions."

If you're unsure, talking to colleagues you trust and respect can also be a good step.

It makes a lot of sense to find out if other people agree with your perspective, but it's also critical that the conversation is handled appropriately.

This is what Gately suggests:

*'Look, I'd really appreciate your objective view of things. I'm really feeling like I'm under pressure here or I'm in the line of fire for the boss, and I'm not really sure why. What's your observations of my approach? What's your observations of their approach?*

*'Do you think there is reasonable there for me feeling sensitive about this? Or do you think perhaps I am just struggling to face the reality that I'm not good at my job?'*

This is an appropriate conversation to have, Gately said.

"If you have that really honest conversation, nobody can come back at you for that."

The next step is to decide what to do about it. While there are several approaches, there's one thing you should never do if your boss is a bully: ignore it.

Gately has been to psychologist offices with clients who have become suicidal as a result of prolonged and unaddressed bullying at work.

It doesn't matter who you are either, she added.

"I've had people phoning me, senior executives phoning me in their car, crying, "I can't go in. I can't go in because the CEO is bullying me," or, "The director's bullying me," or, "A peer is bullying me." And I'm not talking about fragile, hyper sensitive people.

"[If] you're actually being bullied, that is a massive threat to your well being and you need to do something about it."

## **Should I talk to my boss?**

This can be the best approach, but can also be dangerous.

Some bosses don't realise the impact of their behaviour and just think they're being goals-oriented and maybe a bit bossy.

A calm conversation with bosses like this, where an employee talks about their interactions are difficult can have a positive outcome.

However, "In other circumstances, the boss completely loses their mind and fires the person. That is the harsh reality of what we're dealing with."

## **Okay, what can I do then?**

Here, you have a few options. You could talk to a mentor or HR about how to handle the conflict, but talking to your boss' boss might be an even better approach.

“You have this conversation:

*‘I’d really appreciate your advice. I’m really struggling in my relationship with whoever it is, boss. Given they report to you, I was wondering if you were able to give me guidance. If so, how can I can this conversation with them?’*

*“Because I love working here. And I really want this job to work out and I’m ambitious. I can see myself being a part of this organization’s future, but this relationship is becoming very difficult for me to endure and I’d really appreciate your council, your coaching on how to deal with them.’*

The key here is that it isn’t a complaint that’s being escalated - it’s the request for support that’s going higher.

A decent leader can often have a much greater impact on the situation than HR coming into the situation from the side and laying down the law.

## **I have my plan, but what do I do if they bully me between now and that conversation?**

Stay calm.

This is difficult, but can be done, Gately said.

When you’re receiving verbal abuse in or outside of a public place, it feels like you’re being attacked.

“Our brains are going to be immediately be heightened around anxiety,” she said.

“Our capacity to remain calm and rational in that moment actually takes a lot of training. I’m a martial artist by training and we are taught over many, many years how to remain calm, focused, confident in the face of a threat, so I know from experience it’s an incredibly difficult thing to achieve but it is possible. What I think matters most in that moment is actually courage.”

Workers need to have the guts to say, “I want to hear the feedback but I’d appreciate if we could do that in a more confidential space.”

“It’s like we’re on the [martial arts] mat and we’re engaging in a fight there,” Gately said.

“Panicking, freaking out, throwing your arms and legs around is the least likely way [to win]. You’re actually going to come out the victim.”

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