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Don't Blame Your Incompetent Boss; Blame The Peter Principle

Los Angeles, Calif.—Workforce surveys are released each year where workers lament over incompetency of their bosses. [Dr. Noelle Nelson](#), author of [*Got a Bad Boss? Work that Boss to Get What You Want at Work*](#), says it is not necessarily the fault of the boss that he or she is so incompetent so that work suffers and employees grumble. She says to blame it on the Peter Principle.

“The Peter Principle states that ‘every employee tends to rise to their level of incompetence.’ It doesn’t matter the size or the industry, it’s a problem that’s found just about everywhere,” says Nelson. “It then follows that employees who are still in the trenches are the ones most likely to want to do a great job. Hopefully, that’s you.”

Nelson says that though incompetent bosses may seem out of control, they actually behave in predictable ways. “An incompetent boss thinks he knows what he’s doing when he doesn’t,” explains Nelson. “Incompetent bosses will throw more work your way until you’re on overload and then yell when you can’t finish assignments on time. They’ll accept a customer’s completely unreasonable deadline and have no clue what it takes to meet that deadline—leaving you to save the day. These types of bosses have a fear that their secret—that they’re lazy and irresponsible and they desperately need their subordinates to cover for them--will be found out.”

How can you work with an incompetent boss and keep your sanity? Nelson offers these suggestions.

--Prioritize - When an incompetent boss dumps another emergency on your desk, say something like “Be glad to handle this. Which of your other requests would you prefer to delegate to someone else?” Make him commit to delegate some of your work before he has a chance to breathe. Your workload will then remain manageable.

--Clarify Expectations - As soon as the incompetent boss assigns you a piece of work, start taking notes and then go over the notes with him. Even an incompetent boss will not be blind to the fact that your notes, documenting his “here’s what I want” can all too easily be taken upstairs if there is heat later on.

--Check Your Work - Ask your incompetent boss to sign off on your work. At his “Huh?” just smile and tell him how much you appreciate his clarifying things for you. It is an ego stroke that works every time. Once he has given his okay, leave before he can change his mind. Because you have forced him to document his approval of your work, he is less likely to make further changes.

“By following the above guidelines, you’ve made your incompetent boss look competent by forcing him to become more responsible for the work he gives you,” explains Nelson. “You can now do your job with less stress and minimal waste of time, energy and resources. The Peter Principle still applies, but at least your boss’ incompetence will have less of an impact on you.”

For tips on working with specific bad boss types, go to <http://www.noellenelson.com>, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GotABadBoss or at <https://twitter.com/GotABadBoss>.

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