

MANAGING UP

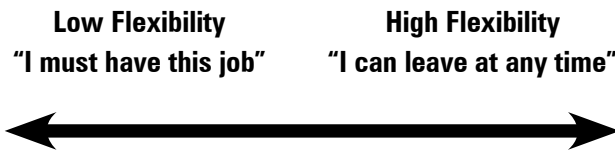
Perhaps the most important person you manage in the workplace is your boss. Unfortunately, most subordinates tend to fall into a victimhood posture, believing they have no influence over their boss's behavior and that they can only react. As Laura has shown, you have better options.

“Managing up” requires that you do your homework on your boss's values and attitudes, what she best responds to, and her capacity to be curious and receive feedback. Your job is then to craft your “upward management” style to match her personality and ability to listen. Remember that this decision on communication style is always your conscious choice.

Directing a boss caught in drama requires both calmness and alertness. You have little chance of influencing her behavior if you're

caught up in your own dramatic behaviors. Emotional displays, arguing, or rationalizing might feel good, but such behaviors rarely lead to clear agreements.

You can't change anyone's personality, least of all your boss's. However, you can be clear on your own boundaries in the relationship. It's important to know where you are on the following job-flexibility spectrum:



If you are more to the left on this spectrum, you'll likely forego crucial conversations with your superiors, instead choosing to seek clear agreements and accepting that the relationship will be more transactional than authentic. You might enlist other advisors or coaches to brainstorm coping tactics and offer support (*not* a pity party), or to maintain your own authenticity. If you are to the left on this spectrum, be wary of the tendency to fall into the helpless victimhood of the Complainer. Though the consequences might be serious (e.g., getting fired and not being able to pay your mortgage), you still have the choice to leave. So, acknowledge that you are still *choosing* to work in the drama-laden environment. No one is forcing you to stay. You are consciously accepting your current situation, including your boss's behavior, and you forfeit your right to complain. While this might sound insensitive, it captures the reality of accepting full responsibility for your life. It's also the gateway out of being a Complainer.

As with coaching subordinates or peers, successfully coaching your boss requires your own maturity and authentic approach to relationships. You have little chance of influencing your boss's behavior if you are caught up in your own drama. Feeling cynical or sorry for yourself might feel good or "right," but it won't change your situation. If you acknowledge and accept your own healthy responsibility for being in a difficult dynamic with your boss, you increase your odds of shifting the dynamic.

Lacking any authority over your boss, your goal is at best an energy-enhancing relationship and at worst an energy-neutral one. As with subordinates, it is important to preemptively assess the risk of having an encounter with your boss. You might accomplish nothing more than being labeled a malcontent. You might trigger her dormant hostility and experience backlash or passive-aggressive behavior. You could be either ostracized or have a ceiling placed on your career growth, at least in your current organization. And you might get fired. None of these are a certainty, but you should at least assess their probability.

If you choose to approach your boss, stay positive and envision a collaborative relationship. Find things you like about her, no matter how difficult that might seem. Set aside your biases and focus on her strong points. And, above all, you need to commit to your own authenticity. Healthy responsibility and authenticity are contagious—help your boss catch them both.

Specific tactics for managing each of the four different drama roles in your boss were presented in part II. On the following page are general tips for working with a boss caught in drama, no matter what type of dramatic tendencies she shows.

GENERAL TIPS FOR WORKING WITH A DRAMATIC BOSS

1	Show your support for him, especially in difficult situations or during challenging times. Let your boss know “you have his back.”
2	Always bring in a positive attitude. Stay calm, upbeat, and interested.
3	Come prepared with a suite of options and your recommendation any time you bring a problem. Then, be open to feedback from your boss, including both new options and options you had rejected. Stay curious!
4	Show your thinking, including the options you dismissed and the rationale for your recommendations.
5	Put yourself in your boss’s shoes. Anticipate the issues your boss is facing with <i>his</i> boss or board. Connect your reasoning to the big picture.
6	When he falls into drama, reflect back your boss’s emotions and honor his perspective while staying unattached. Never negotiate or rationalize with a boss caught in emotion.
7	Take care of yourself. Gently, yet firmly, ask for what you want related to career growth or compensation. Ideally, provide a suite of options acceptable to you, and ask for his commitment to support you.
8	Be tenacious about requiring clear, measurable, written agreements on your job requirements. If your boss insists on keeping assignments vague or ambiguous, maintain a paper trail of all meetings or communication related to your efforts.