

# Standing up to the bully boss

After 20 years of being a secretary, writes one administrative professional, she knows how to do the necessary work. That hasn't kept her current supervisor or her supervisor's boss—both women—from berating and intimidating her.

The admin, who requested anonymity, asks, "How can I learn to stand up for myself in a professional manner?"

Workplace bullying continues to fly under the radar, despite its prevalence. One in three adults has experienced workplace bullying, according to surveys conducted earlier this year by research firm Zogby International for the Workplace Bullying Institute.

So why isn't the problem being tackled more aggressively? Because it's tough to diagnose. How do you know the difference between, say, a demanding or perfectionist boss versus [a bully](#)?

"That's one of the difficult things to grapple with," says Joseph O'Keefe, a senior counsel at law firm Proskauer. "When does it rise above just being a mean boss and reach the level of bullying?"

*The rule of thumb:* Bullying occurs when a manager has an ongoing pattern of intimidating or demeaning behavior that can affect an employee's health.

Some ways to deal with a bad boss:

**1. Have a heart-to-heart.** "Perhaps your boss is one of those people who isn't aware of how he comes across," says Bob Sutton, author of *Good Boss, Bad Boss*. Having a "gentle confrontation" with the manager, he says, may evoke a behavior change.

**2. Get help.** "It's like a bully on the playground," says Tom Davenport, co-author of *Manager Redefined*. "At some point you have to go tell the teacher."

Back up the conversation with a detailed diary of the boss's bad behavior, and give specific examples of how he or she crossed the line. "Don't talk about the way you feel. Don't say 'I'm hurt,'" says workplace consultant Catherine Mattice.

**3. Leave the trouble at the office.** "Learn the fine art of emotional detachment," Sutton says. "Try not to let it touch your soul."

**4. Update your résumé.** "Start planning your escape," advises Sutton. Putting feelers out now will provide a head start when hiring picks up again.

— Adapted from "Survival strategies for workers with bosses who are bullies," Laura Petrecca, *USA Today*.