

My boss is losing it: How do I overcome this?

Question: "My supervisor has memory lapses from time to time. He will give me only partial instructions and then get angry that I did not do things that he forgot to tell me. He really thinks that he didn't forget. How do I handle this?" — *Anonymous*

Comments

I have a pad and pen ready whenever by bosses come to me with a project. I list what they want me to do and when they are finished I read it back to them. Once in awhile they might say " oh yes, also.....

Hope this helps.

Posted by: Toni | August 08, 2008 at 12:29 PM

Ask him to put instructions in an email so that you can add to your calendar so that "you" won't forget. That way you have a written record.

Posted by: bj | August 08, 2008 at 12:32 PM

I was rowing the same boat this past year. I "brainstormed" with my boss on what we both thought might help me remember what she told me to do, thus be more of a support. We came up with the idea of her emailing me so I would have something to refer to, in case I forgot or wanted to be certain I had completed everything. It didn't take her long to realize that it was her memory that was failing and not mine when the completed tasks matched her email requests. She retired.

Posted by: Anonymous | August 08, 2008 at 12:37 PM

The suggestion about taking notes and summarizing back is excellent. It is beneficial to do this with all people you interact with, not just your supervisor.

If this is not an every day occurrence AND the anger is not abusive AND once he vents he moves on and it is over, I offer you the wise advice my father gave me when I started working with him in a management position, sexist as it may be (remember, it did come from a man!):

Men need a way out in order to save face. When backed into a corner, they will fight and make things difficult. When they have "a way out" (such as blaming you), it allows them to move on without harboring continued ill will. In fact, once face is saved, the incident will usually be forgotten by the male ego and your bond will be strengthened.

This also works to some extent with women, but not quite as well as it does with men. :)

Posted by: Julie | August 08, 2008 at 12:45 PM

This happens often with those executives who seem to have a lot on their plate (minds). I find it helpful to say, "Now you've asked me to..." repeating quickly their instructions. Once they hear what you've heard, they often add to their instructions or clarify. This isn't always fail-proof, however. So I won't forget to do anything I'm asked to do, I task everything in Outlook. That way I can see when the assignment was given and where I am in the process. I document steps along the way. With conference calls, I can quickly tell whose court the process is in.

Posted by: DJ | August 08, 2008 at 12:45 PM

There are a few strategies to use when dealing with an difficult boss.

Make sure you are accurate and always document. Presenting facts is a great way to circumvent the emotional thought process that often goes on between boss and employee. Documentation has been made easier with e-mail because it gives you a clear trail of instructions and responses.

Posted by: V. Pegues-Johnson | August 08, 2008 at 12:47 PM

Hack again?!

Posted by: david182007 | August 08, 2008 at 12:49 PM

Whenever anyone ask me anything I bring out the pad and paper. I write everything said then I repeat it back to them. Many times they will say no I actually need this and also that. I think the email ideal is also good but not everyone is around a computer and old fashion pen and pad you can carry with you where ever.

Posted by: | August 08, 2008 at 12:51 PM

Is the memory problem affecting your boss's performance, or just his interaction with you? There may be a bigger issue here if your boss is slipping up on the job. A few years ago I worked for an older man whose developed memory problems. As his assistant, I covered for him many times. Eventually management recognized his problem and let him go. You may want to consider how your boss's memory problem may impact your career.

Posted by: Janet | August 08, 2008 at 01:19 PM

Forget him & move on

I worked for someone who took his wrath out on me for YEARS. New boss is soooo much more pleasant. Whether your boss has a medical excuse, is doing drugs or is just plain ANGRY, it would be healthier for YOU to

find a more hospitable work environment

Posted by: Egadz | August 08, 2008 at 01:42 PM

Taking notes & reading back is a good start. I also show my notoriously forgetful boss a "prototype" of whatever project I've been assigned before producing a finalized version. An example is showing the boss his travel itineraries, but without having finalized transactions. This gives him the opportunity to remember that he needs a rental car or wants an aisle seat - information he did not give you the first time. This is especially usefull when being asked to work on a project that will ultimately involve many parts or copies.

Posted by: | August 08, 2008 at 05:38 PM

I actually encounter this pretty frequently as well. In my office I personally support 6 executives - so you can imagine how many times I get those types of questions. My resolution? Once they give me an assignment/request, I email it back to them... just one that says - okay - you've asked me to do this project, these are the things you expect, this is the deadline, etc., (basically just recapping all the instructions I was given). I always end this email with my saving tag line... "I want to make sure this project is completed properly & in a timely manner - so if anything is missing from your original instructions here, please let me know right away." Then when I do get that question - the first thing is pull up the email string & go through what I sent them... as long as I've hit all the points and never received further instruction from them - I'm covered quite well.

Posted by: Kristie | August 15, 2008 at 01:12 PM