

Managing a 'Teflon Boss'

Like Teflon, some bosses never have anything bad stick to them. Despite abortive projects and unmet commitments, they survive.

If your boss gets away with everything and you're stuck with the mess, then play better offense. You'll never catch a break if you're buried in a landfill you didn't make.

First off, don't try to change your boss. It's almost always futile to try to reform people's behavior when it's in their interest to stay just the way they are. Here's how to take charge:

Forge key alliances. Get to know senior executives at your organization. By developing relationships with influential players, you free yourself from depending solely on a boss who spells trouble. One way to meet higher-ups is to join cross-functional teams. Once you earn the trust of rising stars in other departments, suggest lunch and ask them to bring their bosses along. This way, you initiate contact with head honchos in a friendly way.

Leave a paper trail. When you're cleaning up after your boss, don't grumble. Draft memos to your boss that consist of progress reports or that list your questions, concerns, observations or recommendations. Only "cc" top executives who are tracking the situation if it's part of the normal course of business.

Don't attack or even subtly knock your boss in print. Instead, report the facts and let readers draw conclusions. If you want to distance yourself from an overbudget project, don't blame the boss. Just begin by writing, "Here's an update on your project" and give the latest figures.