

# The hard truth by 'Z': When your boss lets you down

It's great to have a boss whom you admire and respect. But one day, you might discover something that causes you to have serious doubts about this person.

You've got to ask yourself, "Am I going to learn from this experience or cut bait and run?"

The answer isn't easy, especially if you're still reeling from what has happened. It's hard to re-evaluate someone whom you thought was a god. It's painful to realize that your white-knight boss really isn't so special after all.

## A dose of empathy

You're going to be hurt. Accept it. You'll think, "Jeez, I thought I was so lucky to have such an amazing boss." You'll wonder if you're a bad judge of character or if you were just deluded.

I have a friend who thought the world of her boss. Then BOOM! It came out that he had an affair with a subordinate. Morale plummeted. My friend was watching this mess unfold, and she told me, "I feel betrayed by all this."

I told my friend to step into her boss' shoes and try to understand why he did what he did. A little empathy can go a long way. Maybe his action was really a cry for help, an example of truly aberrant behavior.

Whatever the case, the guy certainly did something wrong. I suggested that it might be wise to talk with him about it in a neutral if not supportive tone. After all, there's a reason she liked her boss in the first place, so if he acted out of character like that, he might need some professional help.

## An indirect approach

When you're disillusioned with your boss, it's hard to walk right up and say, "You let me down. Let's talk about it."

But then if you don't say anything, it'll turn into the quintessential "emperor's new clothes" situation: No one's going to talk about it.

You need to pick a moment when you can discuss the matter obliquely as it relates to another business issue. Say you hear that your boss betrayed another VP in a way you can't believe. This gives you an opportunity to discuss the other VP: "He's sure tough to read. I know someone who reports to him, and he just doesn't know what to make of him."

Now be quiet and listen. Your goal is to get your boss to open up, to get information out of him and to learn who he really is. You want to know if he's a slippery SOB or not. And the way to find out is to get him talking without

actually confronting him.

The worst thing you can do when disillusioned is to let your emotions get out of control. People who act out their impulsive feelings with knee-jerk reactions end up hurting themselves. The look-what-you-ruined-for-me accusations or the how-dare-you-do-that lashing out won't solve anything.

You can't change anyone's behavior, just your own. But you can learn from others and gain the priceless value of wisdom.

*"Z" offers insights into what it really takes to get ahead. This 20-year veteran of the corporate battlefield has climbed the ranks to head a \$10 million information services company. We have agreed to protect Z's identity in return for his promise to hold nothing back.*