

Bully boss? At least make sure he's equally disagreeable to all kinds of subordinates

Supervisors are supposed to motivate subordinates. Some bosses take that too far with biting comments, perhaps believing that pointing out flaws spurs employees to work harder.

Leaving aside the dubious effectiveness of that strategy, consider what might happen if a supervisor consistently singles out members of a protected class for tongue-lashings. It could be grounds for a discrimination lawsuit.

Monitor subordinate complaints, looking for unusual patterns. Hidden bias might be a problem if all the complaints come from women, black employees or members of some other distinct protected class.

On the other hand, if the complaints come from a broad cross-section of employees, you may have a bullying problem, but not a legal one.

And as this case shows, having an *equal opportunity* bully boss can sometimes be a plus.

Recent case: Connie was fired from her job as a janitor for excessive absences.

She sued, alleging she was the victim of sex discrimination. She explained that her supervisor had berated her by constantly telling her she was “a disappointment.”

The court said that because Connie couldn’t show that the supervisor singled out women for his sharp comments, she had no case. She offered no evidence that men, for example, weren’t berated by or “disappointing” to the supervisor. (*Drumm v. SUNY Geneseo College*, No. 11-2463, 2nd Cir., 2012)

Final note: Never mind the legal considerations. A boss who bullies employees probably isn’t a very good supervisor.