

How to Survive Under a Tyrant CEO

Q: "Our new CEO is very vindictive. He has 'spies' who feed him stories about employees that he doesn't like. He fires people based on fabricated information, then displays his power by having security accompany them off the premises. I recently met with him to explain how this is hurting the business. I had data to prove that customer satisfaction and employee turnover have gotten worse since he arrived. But the CEO placed me on final warning for insubordination. For the next year, I can be immediately terminated for any additional offense. How do I establish a safe relationship with this man? — **A Dedicated Manager**

Marie's answer: You've learned the hard way that the CEO position has almost unlimited power. Your final warning puts you perilously close to receiving one of the infamous security escorts, so here are some suggestions for escaping that fate:

- With a malicious CEO, the only safe strategy is to lie low. Concentrate on your work and avoid drawing attention to yourself. When you talk with him, be respectful, pleasant and cooperative. After awhile, his wrath may dissipate.
- To reduce your stress, stop trying to change things that are completely out of your control, like the CEO's management style. Make no further attempts to enlighten him. Immature executives view any negative feedback as a personal attack.
- Even if you survive, you're still trapped in a toxic organization, so start exploring job opportunities elsewhere. If you stay, both your mental and physical health will eventually begin to suffer.

The lesson here is that paranoid managers almost always fail in the long run. Their brutal style not only keeps them from learning about problems, but also drives away top performers. Unfortunately, however, their downfall often takes quite awhile.

For some Office Coach suggestions on dealing with top management, see [How to Work with Executives](#).