

## **The Profiles**

### Chapter Three

#### **Friend Then Foe, Then Friend Again.....**

Also known as - The Fair Weather Boss

So I think you will recognise this one straightaway. Our first Case Study comes from Stacey. Stacey was in her late twenties when she was head-hunted by an American software company based in central London to be part of a small sales team. The company had an HQ in the US and about fifteen employees in the UK. Stacey told me about the company and how it was positioned. The business was described to her as having software solutions which, while they were complex and 'cutting edge', was an application that had practically no competition in the market.

Although it is necessary to give some detail about the companies involved in these studies we must not be distracted from the personalities that are the focus of this book. Each case will only have brief details about the companies/employers involved unless they are relevant to the story. The reason for this is that the purpose of this book is to help you by recognising the boss profiles described; they may exist in any number of types of company and different environments. I don't want you to become distracted by the actual work scenes that our brave storytellers experienced. The personalities of these bosses and how their personal pressures, fears and drivers influence their 'mad' behaviour must shine through unfiltered for you to recognise.

#### **Stacey's story**

The role; Sales and business development for a software company.

Stacey remembers how well it started. She had a very smooth interview process. The Managing Director, who she was to report to, held three interviews, one of which was a very touchy feely role-play session – 'how enlightened' she remembers thinking!

In this story we shall call the MD Peter. Stacey remembers how charming he was. 'I remember he was very keen to tell me about how profitable the company was. He told me that there were great career opportunities as the company was expanding rapidly'. Peter seemed relaxed and professional. Stacey continues 'Looking back I probably should have asked more about Peter's background and his management in the US but he had given me pretty specific details on the financial state of the company. As my previous company had always been struggling with financial problems it was just a relief to have the prospect of being with a successful company. I was really excited about the prospect of having the opportunity of being with such a professional outfit and was flattered about being headhunted for the first time'.

So looking back Stacey could see her first mistakes. But Peter had made her feel very welcome, conducted a very thorough interview process and communicated a very positive view of the company. It would have been difficult for either of them to have really faulted this part of the process – except that Stacey hadn't asked enough questions of her future new boss. Additionally she didn't ask to speak to any members of the team she was to join and, worst of all, she was attracted by the financial position of the company, and used that as the main criteria for her decision to join. Cash flow had been a big problem at her previous company so her attraction to the new company's financial security was a big part of her feeling good about the decision to join.

This is a good example of how, just like with other relationships, we can react in a mercurial way to given traits, status, personality or any other number of stimuli. We are drawn to a situation that appears to be the antithesis of the former experience. In the world of job-hunting this is a mistake – it's difficult but essential to try and look at situations (vacant!) with an objective level attitude. Of course you want to work for a successful company with a health care scheme, including dental, subsidised canteen and a parking space but it will be the people you are surrounded by and with whom you interact on a daily basis that will most strongly control and influence your personal success and happiness.

So back to the story: Peter is pretty charming, smiles freely and paints a wonderful picture. Stacey can't wait to start. The organisation is doing so well. She is just what they have been looking for. She will be a great addition to the team. When can she start?

It seems quite well organised on the surface. Stacey is looking forward to working with her new boss, she can see he is very keen and works hard. The job will be a challenge; there are deadlines and targets. As she passes through the office after her final interview and receiving the job offer, everyone in the modern quiet office seems very focussed. What a great opportunity...

Stacey describes how in the space of two to three weeks her fantastic new opportunity turned in to her own personal hell.

The profile type we are uncovering in this story is the boss who seems to be unsure of how friendly to be. They don't really know how to manage people and will have had no training. One minute they are helpful and supportive and the next they are aggressive and distant. Stacey's story is an excellent example of this particular profile, as Peter exhibited amazing extremes of this behaviour. This profile is often the successful employee who is promoted as a 'reward' but not given the training and therefore the tools to complete their new role. Perhaps from this view we might start to see that the scenario goes beyond the responsibility of these two unhappy players, Stacey and Peter.

Stacey smiles broadly as she recounts her story (she says the smile is only possible because she has now left the job) Unfortunately in this example Stacey was not able to create a survival strategy so the tactics for coping with this profile are supplied by another person who has managed to survive the all too common 'Friend then Foe then Friend Again' boss. Sadly Stacey did not have the benefit of this information.

'I will never forget the first time I became aware of the terrible flaw in Peter's management style. During the first couple of days we spent a lot of time together, he wanted to get me up to speed on the product as soon as possible. It was the steepest learning curve I had ever experienced. The pace was unrelenting and after a week I was exhausted, the trouble was, so was Peter. He was trying to train me but trying to do his own job as well.

I had joined on an understanding that (just like my previous roles) it would be normal to work from home a couple of days a week. Towards the end of the second week I approached Peter to ask if, as I had a lot of reading and research to do, he would mind if I spent the next two days studying at home. He turned suddenly and rounded on me, he was not the calm smiling man who had welcomed me to the 'Team' less than a fortnight earlier. I was so shocked. He could have simply said that he would prefer me in the office but he became very angry and started shouting, "I am not here to support you! You are producing nothing! You need to be out in front of customers! You need to get this stuff and get it quickly!" I was absolutely gob smacked. He was furious. One question I had asked at interview was 'how long is the typical sales cycle' and he had answered me, "6 to 9 months" so to be 'producing' anything one fortnight in to the job was preposterous. I didn't understand what had changed, why was he suddenly so angry? He had gone from charm personified, all smiles and 'high fives' to a snarling vicious angry little boy, he reminded me of my sister's two-year-old child. He berated me for my selfishness and lack of commitment; he was sulky and cross. I was so upset I apologised and said I would come to the office and that it was no problem. I just didn't know how to react and was shocked at the strength of his reaction. I was too scared to remind him about our agreement about home working. I left the office that night feeling completely unsure of myself and not looking forward to going back the next day. I kept going back over the events of the previous ten days and couldn't understand why he seemed to be like a different person.

I had been attentive and engaged while Peter went through the product training and had not given him a single reason to doubt my commitment. I was genuinely excited about the role as I would be able to travel throughout Europe and would be opening doors at a very high level in top companies; I had made a career out of being enthusiastic and positive, what had I done wrong?

The next day added to my confusion. Peter apologised for being angry and was smiling again. He said that what had happened was 'tension' and it was his style to be 'emotional'. I was so relieved, what was I worried about? Obviously there was nothing to be concerned about, it was just me, I was tired and anxious, and I wanted to do a good job. I didn't want them to have any regrets about hiring me.

But it became a vicious circle. I would ask for something, I would ask for some information, I would ask for a reminder on a product detail and he would react – and it was almost always the same. He made such a fuss over every answer, he made me feel really stupid, but I knew they were reasonable questions, at least at first I did. But the more annoyed he was at my questions, the more anxious and 'stupid' I became. I would repeat question, forget answers and slowly found my confidence being eroded away. I was so anxious and worried about every word I said, thinking it was going to be shot down as 'wrong', I was getting worse and worse, I felt tired all the time and started to feel ill. His constant correcting of my answers and then his comments about wondering about having made a mistake at my 'calibre' really got to me. I felt so unhappy; I felt it was not tenable for me to stay.

Some people would have been stronger I know, but that's how it effected me. In sales you are only regarded as successful when you start bringing in deals, I was under so much pressure, it prevented me from learning effectively and was feeling my confidence slipping. It just wasn't the way to manage me. Generally sales people want encouragement and support, a bit of 'ra-ra' to get them going and enthusiastic. This boss was just watching for every chance to criticise and trying to find my cracks and weaknesses. In the end he was the one creating them'.

So Stacey found herself, after only a few weeks, under enormous pressure from a highly stressed boss, asking completely unreasonable things: constantly criticising, aggressive and sarcastic. She would not know where she stood from one day to the next. The sessions with Peter where he expressed his frustration with her performance were interspersed with times, sometimes even a few hours at a time, of him being very friendly, passive and patient. But sometimes he would be almost schizophrenic in his behaviour, turning into a snarling, whining, angry and aggressive child at the drop of a hat, not normally prompted by anything more than a simple question or a simple statement. Stacey was a professional sales person who had asked about the typical sales cycle, understood the sector if not the detail of the product and was punctual, motivated and loyal. With in weeks she had become de-motivated, anxious, tired and felt her confidence ebbing away.

Stacey continues 'I felt that the minute I spoke to him in a 'normal' way, tried to make a little joke or comment he would change. He would let you get so close and then turn. There was no science in it. Sometimes a comment that had been acceptable on other occasions would make him distant and cool. It was absolutely terrible; I cannot tell you how unnerving this can be over time. It's like a sort of torture. You need to build relationships and trust with the people you work with, but I just couldn't work him out, or where I stood from one day to the next. I was not the only person who felt like this in the office. Many of the others had seen him get like it over the four years he had been there and had worked with him as a colleague before his promotion and did not take his tantrums to heart like I did. They were use to him, they sometimes got mad and answered him back, but I felt I couldn't do this. I was the new sales girl, trying to prove my worth, and he was the boss. I couldn't imagine talking to him like some of them did. They all said he had got worse over time'.

What was going on? Was her boss mad? He had paid a big fee for her and spent hours in a recruitment process. What would make him behave in this way, was he mad?

Stacey left the company after 7 months. She did secure a couple of deals but in her words the experience was like 'torture'. She even walked away from a sizable commission cheque; the misery she was being forced to endure made her feel it was just not worth it. Stacey took a couple of weeks to look at the market and secured a new sales role with a much larger company. 'Where I had joined Peters company because I was going to be the big fish in a small pond, with my new role I actively searched for a much larger company where I would not come under so much focus. I can remember studying the sales manager who interviewed me. I remember I asked him if he had had any training. He had been a little surprised and told me he had not but that 20 years in the role had given him enormous experience. I can remember I then asked if I could speak to one of his team alone, again he was surprised but allowed it. I did not tell him about my previous experience, but that was what it had taught me. This company had a structured training program that gave you time and resource to learn about the product. Looking back there are other questions I could have asked but even just asking these two things made me more secure about accepting the job, I knew from my talk I had with the team before I joined that he was a reasonable mature person, and that I could expect to be successful. It was like a breath of fresh air to work for my new boss and I wished I hadn't stayed so long with the other company, it nearly destroyed me'.

Stacey made the choice to leave so we cannot learn from her what alternative strategies she could have employed, and may be the lesson here anyway is – You don't have to put up with bad bosses. There are enough companies out there looking for good people and treating them well–join one.

#### The Interview Process

Later in this book there is a section about the interview process. I have learned a lot through personal experience. But the main thing I want you to remember is – Interview your new boss! As a recruitment consultant I can remember telling people to learn as much as they could about the company they were looking to join, but I never told them to check out the background of the boss. This however will be addressed in detail later.

So going back to Stacey, what could she have done if she had decided she wanted to see it through and stay? How do you deal with such a difficult situation? People's personalities dictate to a great degree what actions they are able to take. Telling someone in Stacey's position to just 'ignore him and get on with it' as some of her colleagues had suggested was not going to work. She had to have, like many of us, a reasonable, harmonious work environment where she felt valued, and encouraged.

#### Mad Peter?

First we will look at why Peter may have behaving in this way. His promotion path explains some of his behaviour. Managers who have been promoted from 'the team' often struggle with their credibility with their old colleagues. Even if the team accepts that he was certainly the 'man for the job' he is unsure of the new boundaries he has to maintain in terms of authority and discipline and of how friendly or sociable he can be. He is racked with insecurity, are his old team mates taking advantage of their relationship to pull the wool over his eyes? Do they really respect and accept his authority? He was in the team, what can he allow them to 'get away' with? He suddenly feels isolated and can feel doubts about some of his decisions.

So one day he will come in to the office seeking interaction with the team he has worked with for years, and asks them to join him for a beer after work: he is generally affable and calm. But as the day progresses, one colleague has called in sick, another has asked to leave early for the dentist and another has forgotten to make a phone call. All of a sudden these petty instances combine to make him feel that he is a 'soft touch' and that he is being taken advantage of. In his isolation and with his latent fears he over reacts and spins into a cycle of unreasonable retribution. Suddenly everything is criticised, no one appreciates his 'difficult position' and warning letters are threatened left right and centre!

Of course this is the example in the extreme, the staff issues are completely minor and he's reaction is over the top. But the model will fit a boss you know. Their struggle with their own insecurities means they are difficult to get close to, difficult to please. They see a close relationship as potentially threatening and have to constantly re-assert them selves as the boss even if they really, as all humans, want to be included, and liked. The strain of being in isolation, promoted by *his* managers and then left high and dry with not even a day of management training means Peter has become tired and irritable. He is desperate to succeed and prove to his bosses that they have made the right decision. He must not fail; but he is behaving in a way that will lose him the main thing he needs - his team to support him - and can't judge a reasonable request from his staff with out wondering if it's being asked as a 'favour'. And remember this profile is just as likely to turn up on a construction site, a factory or shop floor as an office. Peter is also a victim of a 'mad boss' and whilst we may understand the situation, how can we learn to deal with this, for the sake of our own sanity on a day to day basis?

The isolation, the fear of failure, the lack of trust are the key elements behind his behaviour, combined with tiredness these create the dual personality of the Friend, Then Foe Then Friend Again boss profile. He is undermined by a feeling that he is not respected.

Peter could have avoided all this. After about a year as a manager he should have left and joined another company as a manager. The new company/team would only ever have seen him as a manager and would behave accordingly; a major part of his baggage would have been shed, no old team members to haunt him.

Below we will explore the practical ways you can start to manage this type of environment, but always remember that your boss may seem mad, but he may not be bad. These strategies which are to save your sanity are not to be at the expense of his. In all our examples if you are able to step back and can understand why your boss is having difficulty you are half way there...

### The strategy for Peter

When you have learned how to effectively interview, after you have read the interview chapter in this book, don't let this kind of boss put you off. If the company and the role fit the job, and the salary you are after, this boss profile will become the perfect background against which you will shine. When you understand not only his fears and drivers but also your own value and power and the timings of when to use it, you will be able to deal with this type of boss. You have so much ammunition and I will show you how to use it. You don't have to suffer the misery of the Friend, Then Foe Then Friend Again boss.

The details of this next section will not be repeated in the following chapters describing the other boss profiles but are important to remember what ever boss problem you are facing or, if you are thinking of leaving your job, but really don't want to go. Realising your value goes a long way to altering your perspective on your job and will help to relieve immediately some of the stress you may be feeling. Companies don't like firing people and more and more it is accepted, certainly in the more enlightened organisations, that having happy employees leads to having happy customers - and that leads to larger profits..

*NB*

*This is not a Smart Arse book that will help you trick your employers. This is not how to 'get out of stuff'. This is not meant to help you sue your boss for situations you manipulate or to make other people miserable. You will be successful with these strategies if the following 'hygiene factors' are followed 100%.*

- 1) You turn up for work, on time (special, unplanned, emergency situations excluded) and are dressed appropriately.*
- 2) You are not verbally or physically abusive*

*3) Have established you are qualified for the job as described in the hiring process. (I would like to say 'job description', but sadly this document is not always available, as part of the Interview process –but request it! If it does not exist offer to write it when you have been in the role for a while.) Regarding being 'qualified' for the role, there is an exception I have come across, where an individual is hired because they interview very well and are liked at a personal level by the boss, who feels they will 'get on well' with that person, but who is not, in fact, qualified. This only comes to light at a later stage and both parties will need to put in no little effort to sort it out.*

Even if a company does not pay a recruitment consultancy to find and hire you, the process of hiring staff involves huge cost.

The role needs to be advertised. Someone at the hiring company has to review the applications. Interviews have to be scheduled. The interview process may take anything from 30 minutes to several hours over several meetings. These take managers away from their work and are most costly from that point of view.

Your desk, computer, tools, equipment, 'phone - all need to be ready for you when you start. Administration of the process, letters, calls and in some cases travel expenses mean that you, from the day you start, have a value; they don't want to have to go through it all again unnecessarily!

So those are the financial costs but there are others. When a manager or a company offers you the post, they have to some extent put their reputation on the line. They have said 'I think this is the right person for the job'. If they are wrong, it will reflect badly on how their decision-making abilities are judged. Imagine how long a manager who makes continuous errors of judgement in recruitment would last? Not long.

Emotionally they have also invested in you. They want you to succeed; their success depends on it. From small family firms right up to a corporation, after this time, money and decision process, after this investment in you, they want to get it all back and more!. They hang their hopes on you. Their success depends on your delivery. They HOPE like mad that they have made the right decision.

So weighing up all this you have the greatest value the day you walk in the door. So don't be nervous on your first day. Let them make the fuss of you that you deserve. It may be hard to grasp that you don't have to impress them on the first day, let them impress you. In a relaxed state of mind you will remember more of the information that is being fed to you. You will appear more professional and the respect this will earn you is invaluable.

### First Day Summary

Be Calm – you will learn and remember more

Remember they paid for you, they have invested in you

Their Hopes are pinned on you

The impression you give in these early days could affect the rest of your time with that company

### Back to the strategy for Peter

I will assume for the purpose of this book that you have joined a company not having read this before and have not been able to implement a 'From Day One' strategy. I will further assume that you have not been suffering this scenario for more than a year. Perhaps you are in a situation where a colleague has been promoted to be your boss or you have joined a company like Stacey and found yourself in a miserable existence.

Some of the strategy themes re-occur as solutions for other boss types described in this book, perhaps you might use them for some of the other profiles. Where applicable I will direct you when I think that the profiles are typically linked and the use of additional strategies helpful.

The reason for the misery in so many cases is that the employee (or individual in any area of life) feels they have lost control, or have a serious lack of control of the situation in which they find themselves. That they are in a place where they are on 'a hiding to no where'. They are performing, as they understand they should but it is actually not having any affect. As Stacey remembers 'What ever I did, it seemed to be wrong, I lost track of how I could answer him, of how I could succeed in the job'.

So how do you get back control and stop the misery? Can you get the boss to understand the effect he is having on you? Can you help the boss be a better boss, can you help the boss?

There are immediate things you can do, the first one on the list is so simple, you can do it tomorrow and it can have an instant affect.

I understand that for some people this may take all their confidence but I can assure you that confidence builds from success and from there grows organically. From the first time you start to flex your 'confidence muscles' you will feel the strength growing. Work them and you will be surprised how far they will carry you – trust me.

### Getting Control Back, the strategy of Changes

So here is how you start.

Just behave in ways that you have not behaved before. Change responses, behaviours. Ask questions. Make physical changes, (I am not suggesting plastic surgery – read on) postural changes, voice changes. Re-state reasonable but previously unsatisfied requests: make sure the company is treating you correctly and with conformance to the contract.

Start to re-draw the lines of what is acceptable and what is not but within the 'rules' of the company itself. You don't have to do anything more than just start to slowly let it be know that (and we are assuming you are unhappy here) you are not going to accept poor treatment any longer. It can be a gentle, slow process but do start it!

And the main thing is – as you make these changes don't tell anyone: this must be a part of your strategy. You want them guessing and looking to you. You will need to be a little strong if you are normally the sort of person who avoids conflict or standing out. Remember how much as a kid you would pester a friend who had 'a secret'?

That is the sensation we are trying to create. It will intrigue your boss. What are you up to? You will appear to have some power or knowledge and they will want to know so very much just what it is. This may seem petty, but I can assure you, if carried through correctly, will cause an immediate pivotal shift in the power base in the relationship with your boss. We don't want to upset him, but we can't have you taken for granted. And the good news is you can do this in steps that are manageable for your level of comfort.

As you make your changes you will grow in confidence, and, as we have established, confidence grows through use. These changes mean you will be observed differently, the true measure of confidence is saying nothing and waiting to be asked - and every one else listening, not jabbering away, and telling everyone everything. Do not explain why, do not tell anyone anything.

What do I mean by the changes above?

If you always arrive late because the train you normally take means you cannot get to work on time get an earlier one, even if it means arriving very early.

If traffic means you are normally late, get up earlier leave half an hour earlier and get to work early or at least on time. If your childcare arrangements mean you are struggling to make the required start, make changes.

Get a new haircut or style, but (so long as anyone notices) don't launch into discussions about it.

If you normally turn up for work dressed like you slept in your clothes get a sharp suit. Conversely if you normally dress like you are going to the races, dress down. Get casual; keep smart.

If you are the person in the work place who normally diffuses situations with humour, stop. If you normally don't join in with the jokes, start telling them.

When you have to communicate a problem does your voice go three octaves higher? Stop whining. Control your voice. See the power you can get from just lowering your voice. The words 'I really need you to explain that again' become loaded with power if spoken slowly and low – go on try it! Compare the impact with communicating the same content as a high-pitched defensive complaint.

The same can be said about posture. If you find yourself crossing your arms, unfold them; most people know a little about the power of body language and have heard how this conveys aggression or defensiveness. Make eye contact. This is essential. When you start combining your new low slow spoken questions whilst keeping eye contact you have started to get your control back. I appreciate some may find this harder than others, practice on your friends!

Stacey had always been able to make eye contact, and as sales person understood how to use body language, but had trouble saying the things she really wanted to say and saying them in a way that got noticed. 'Looking back I know I probably didn't manage to tell him just how difficult I was finding it, I just blamed myself, and really that was part of the problem of my confidence fading, he made me feel stupid, but I needed him to clearly understand he was not delivering the training I needed or allowing the time I needed'.

Ask questions. If a new company procedure does not make sense or seems wrong – question it, don't accept it, you will not need to be aggressive, just ask.

If at the time you joined your contract said you would receive certain tools or training, make sure you have had them all. Don't roll over and accept that the contract is generally treated with lip service. So you were promised a mobile phone for business but some how you ended up using your own. Get what you should have, again its not aggressive – it's assertive!

So I am sure you are now getting the picture. This is a fairly easy part of the strategy and at first you may wonder at its value. I can assure you that you will find power in not behaving as people expect, maintain first class work and stick to the rules, but by not being an open book, certainly with your boss, he will start to feel some of the insecurity that he has put you through, not knowing how you will react, and not being able to assume how his instructions will be handled and realising that you are questioning where perhaps before you were passively accepting.

But say nothing. Don't justify or explain your behaviour, because that's how you create the 'secret'.

### Back to Strategy

Lets say for example that Stacey instead of struggling to learn from her stressed irritable boss had not been so keen? She should not have been put in a position of struggling to play catch up on the product details.

'You are so busy; you are not explaining things well enough. I need more time to understand'.

'We could shorten my learning cycle if you dedicate some time to teaching me'.

Stacey may have found these things hard to say in her fragile state, we will aim for you not to get to that stage.

So change how you speak to your boss, make the content assertive, not aggressive.

Change as much of your behaviour as possible to create a new you, easy stuff, but powerful.

### Next Steps

So changing your behaviour is a first step but there is more work to be done. With the classic Friend Then Foe Then Friend Again boss profile, they do have windows of time when they are extremely affable and pleasant (This is the problem; you are never sure which way they are going to go). So we now need to use these windows effectively. The temptation is to be very friendly in return, in relief you bathe in the sunshine of his friendliness. You are friendly and laugh at the jokes. You believe you are getting to know him better...

In this situation, somewhere in the back of our fragile little minds, we hope that this is building a relationship with him, one that will stand us in good stead when we next need support, understanding or just the answer to a question. We actually believe that he will look at us differently the next time you ask him for assistance or advice. WRONG big WRONG!

We are pandering to his need to feel liked and included, if anything he will deeply regret being friendly and when the opportunity (reason) next arises will be even more distant, aggressive and unhelpful, leaving you with that feeling that he must be a schizophrenic. He is afraid that he has been too friendly and may have left himself open to being 'taken advantage of'. In this mind set he u-turns feeling he must remind you and re-enforce that he is the boss! That is why he can one minute be treating you like his best mate and then so suddenly become very unfriendly.

Instead when he is in friendly mode don't try to be friendly in return, be a little distant and aloof, *criticise him*. This, of course, must be done very very carefully. Remember during these friendly windows he is fulfilling *his* need to feel liked and included, and you are going to tell him (or at least behave as if) you don't like him. This will need to be a gradual process, but you increase the level every time you get the opportunity. It's like the mother crocodile that having just watched her eggs hatch has her normal killer instinct suppressed long enough for her to carry the babies in her mouth to the safety of the river. Your boss in 'I need to feel included and liked' mode has his reactive, aggressive button switched to 'off'. He is feeling pretty 'self congratulatory', at that moment, he has convinced himself that not only is he a great boss, but can still be part of and liked, by the team! He would find it difficult to 'snap' out of it!

He will listen. It will go in. It will need to be repeated. Don't fall in to the trap of being too friendly again too quickly. If he wants you to like him let him earn it.

It can be a very mild conversation to start, he won't even notice.

"Peter, I was wondering about your decision to cancel the training last week? What came up?"

So he will talk, you will listen attentively, you are trying to find out what is motivating him, is he under pressure, what is his problem?

So you build the questioning over time: gently criticising him, reminding him carefully about situations where he let you down or was possibly unreasonable. You may even be able to tell him you sometimes find it difficult to talk to him. It is essential not to fall back into the 'hope he will like me' mode. Keep the questions up, over time, not aggressive, and build them till you asking 'why did they make you boss? 'Have you ever had any training?' and the end goal is to tell him that the way he is managing you is not as good as it could be, it's not the best way to motivate you, and its making you very unhappy.

So this process may need some skill, if you change your mind about following it through, only do this after trying it at least once.

When at this 'susceptible' level, you will be able to start asking him these things and communicating you concerns. If you are serious about staying and keeping your sanity, you must try it.

Vanity is a great tool. Also in his head instead of just trying to be friendly, you have shown an interest in his career, you are asking him things no one else asks. So now we need to start making suggestions....

Come on – Get creative!

Now I know I have already made a lot of assumptions in this book and now I am going to make another: that you have understood the opportunity that exist during your Friend Then Foe Then Friend Again bosses windows of calm, lucid thought. So you must now start telling him a story. If you have never been fortunate enough to have a really good boss, it won't stop you, but I now need you to create in you head *your* perfect boss. How you would like to be spoken to, managed, encouraged and supported. Perhaps you have friend or colleague who has the experience to help you. Build your own 'Best Practice' boss. And then feed the picture back to you boss.

'Do you know Peter one of the best bosses I ever worked for use to hold 'Company Picnics' once a month. We would send out for food and everyone would join in for lunch. It was a great opportunity to introduce new team members and was great for morale and communication, and it was all in our lunch hour'.

'Do you know Peter one of the most successful bosses I worked for use to hold Amnesty meetings for the team. You could say what you liked with out fear. We use to really learn from the mistakes we made and that meant instead of covering things up and making the same mistake two weeks later, we improved processes enormously, the benefits to the company were amazing'.

Getting the picture again? You are not criticising him. If the poor devil has never had any training he may not have heard of any of these things before. And you don't need training either; just imagine the best work environment you can. (It might be a good idea to make a note of the main points you give to your boss, as a reference – you don't want to look inconsistent. In fact one of the requirements for the success of this strategy is to be extremely consistent. You can't exhibit at any stage any of the vacillating mood traits of your boss – and remember, if the call should ever come how well prepared you will be for management....?!)

Also it is difficult to predict a timescale for the strategy outlined about. It will almost certainly be months, but you will be able to enjoy planning your questions and creating your 'Best Practice' boss. I would say that you should have seen some change in 3-4 months.

Key points:

- Be consistent and persistent
- Keep your stories straight
- Don't behave like you boss, like an unpredictable, emotional see-saw.
- Work the strategies, if possible, in parallel

#### Another thread

So we have started to get somewhere. It's not an overnight process but just *having* a process will be starting to ease your misery. Enjoy making the changes. See how far you can go with the questioning. Push it!

And next... Not everyone will have this opportunity but a lot of you will. The next step is to build a network of contacts at his level or above. If at all possible get to know your boss's boss!

It has fascinated me on two levels, that, if you are able to get to know the boss's boss, 1) how they are normally totally aware of the fault defect in your boss and 2) their complete lack of loyalty to him in discussing it with you. Sadly, they are unlikely to offer to send him on a training course. So why are we doing this?

Peter is a stroppy child, aggressive and dominating. He believes that he can behave like this because he is the boss, and in his little world he is in control. You will do as he says, no one will know, no one will find out. But of course he has insecurities and we are going to play with them. This will not be a cruel approach because everyone will come of the situation happier and with more energy for their work. Freed from the emotional drain of being the unchecked boss, and you free of his questionable behaviour, both of you will be more successful. So many of the Friend Then Foe Then Friend again bosses are simply victims themselves of a misplaced 'reward' of management.

You don't ever have to criticise your boss to your boss's boss, but you should get to be on friendly terms with them. Use whatever pretext you can. If there is no valid work reason find another. Perhaps he likes pigeon racing or stamp collecting, what ever it is use it to make contact, and be able to communicate with him. You may get the opportunity to be introduced through a company social event, but just do it.

Once you have established the connection with Peter's boss this is then the conversation that we can have with Peter. Lets call Peters boss 'Gerald'.

'Hey Peter, I am still having problems getting the correct invoices out to the customers in the North'.

Peter 'Well just sort it out! You know we can't survive if the invoices aren't sent! Why can't you just sort it!'.

'Well we were supposed to have had training on the accounts system but you cancelled it. I don't know how to put it together'.

Peter 'God! Do I have to do everything around here'.

'I know Gerald just said to me the other day how tough it is trying to find the time and people for training. They have a similar problem in the manufacturing division'.

Bingo!

He now knows you speak to Gerald. Gerald and you may only have spoken about stamps but he doesn't know that. If he follows up Gerald will know who you are. What else are you discussing with Gerald? We need Peter to feel insecure, to start having thoughts like 'Does Gerald think I can't cope?' 'Does Gerald know I cancelled the training?' We need Peter to accept that his behaviour is not 'secret' and may be visible to people in the company which he would prefer did not. Again this is to make him check his behaviour, who is helping him to become a better manager?

Now of course this is not a 'one size fits all' scenario and I appreciate this is a simplified view, but again, try it! The power of suddenly not looking or feeling like a standalone victim is amazing. Feel the power!

Another way to put a check Peter's mad comments and statements is to make them 'public'. If he has made outrageous comments to you and your colleagues in a meeting (when he is playing The Boss in his world), refer to these comments when other bosses, managers or even visitors are around. Peter was known for slamming his hand on the desk and telling people 'you will never be successful at this company unless you work through the whole week-end!!' or 'the only excuse for being late is if you are dead!!'. Now clearly these are stupid, crass and ignorant statements. So let's tell everyone!! But for maximum impact do it *in front of him*. Turning to your colleague in a meeting with the various audience as indicated above, and saying 'don't forget, Peter said we will never be successful unless....' etc Will Peter reflect more carefully on his comments to you if he discovers that there is the possibility that you will share these ridiculous statements with his wider audience? Oh yes I believe he will. How can these stupid sentences be viewed as anything other than damaging to Peter's image? Of course they will. It is likely that he will begin to take more care in how he communicates his thoughts. There is even another outcome to this particular part of the strategy, if you are very good you may- in showcasing these terrible comments in the right, ridiculous light – make it a funny event. If Peter could have laughed at himself for making these comments, could he have reflected on them, and seen for himself what he was really doing? I would love to hear stories from anyone who has been able to make this happen.

### Nuts and Bolts in the strategy

So we have made some changes that have given us our feeling of power, the secret. We have started to build a sense of control. The questions and suggestions put forward during the windows of friendliness will start to build a true relationship. We have manoeuvred to get to know his bosses and peers, so his behaviour (so far as he is concerned) is not secret, its out. What else is left?

There is technology.

The next time you are due to have a meeting tell him that you intend to record it. It is not difficult to get a tape recorder. Your reasoning will be – that there is a lot to remember, (He has as good as told you that you are stupid) you really want to understand and you know that the repetition of your questions irritates him, so this way you can play back the meeting and hear the points/training/instructions at your leisure. It is a perfectly reasonable request. It shows initiative and demonstrates how keen you are to learn and improve(!)

But this can create an incredible affect. He is almost bound to agree. Your request is unassailably fair; you are showing your intelligence in wanting to get the most from the meeting. But of course we all know what else it's saying. You Mr Boss, have to do a good job. You cannot swear or get aggressive; you must be clear and professional and not resort to tantrums. Power!!! (And you get to learn, get your meeting clarified – that's what I call a win-win)

And it doesn't end there. How often does the stressed irritable Friend Then Foe Then Friend Again boss say things that they later deny? I have experience of bosses saying one thing to me and then saying they didn't or that I misunderstood.

So get to know your other recording options; you can use the recording facility on your mobile phone to great effect. I realise that in the office or meeting environment that it won't always be possible to whip out a recording instrument, but many of us have to communicate through mobile phones. Have you ever used the recording option on yours? When talking, if you think that the conversation is heading towards a crucial statement that needs recording just press the options button – the one showing while you are talking and press the record option. Most will do a minute or two and it will be stored on the phone, date and time stamped! If the recording facility runs out, cut the call (blaming 'poor signal') and then call him back and record again.

We are unlikely to ever need it in a court of law but it is again incredibly powerful.

But here's the tip - don't use any 'incriminating' recording in anger. The power is in choosing your moment. During one of those lucid moments, (one of the 'friendly boss' windows) when you may have already for days or weeks before taken a load of grief over a Friend Then Foe Then Friend Again memory moment – where he will have denied something he said to you, get the phone and remind him of the incident and yes, make it all a good natured big joke, smile all the way, play the recording back to him. – Keep laughing, amazing modern technology, isn't it?

It will be a long time before you will have to record anything again.

If you have email communication at work and many people do, you can of course use this to protect yourself, but I don't think I need to elaborate here. Only one tip, set up a folder to store all the emails you feel might be useful in future and call it something really innocuous like 'Drafts2'. Regularly send copies through to a private email address, if possible.

### Practical and Immediate

All these parts of the strategy are just that, strategies, and as we have seen may take some time to come to fruition, some will work better than others and some may not be options. I would also hope they may start to give you some ideas of your own, but here is another thing you can do which carries minimal risk with the Friend Then Foe Then Friend Again boss which you can do tomorrow. Talk more to your colleagues about how you feel. They know him now and, if he was an internal promotion, what he was like when he was at their level. Some quality must have highlighted him as suitable for the promotion so be prepared that there could be some jealousy, but they will have the benefit of familiarity. What were his good points are you missing out on learning from a great coach? He has been rewarded for his success – learn from him too.

Stacey joined a company at full stretch. If she could have spent more time talking to Peter's old team she may have been able to have put things into perspective. The stories they can tell can take some of the sting out of what you are experiencing. They will tell you about the mistakes the boss made, how long it took him to learn and the clients he annoyed – all good stuff, all helping to put things into perspective.

Stacey's colleagues were all under so much pressure it was difficult to find time to talk, this was not an option for her, but this was also a sign of the unhealthy management of her office which a good interview process may have revealed.

### And Finally

Don't let a boss like Peter let you lose faith in yourself. Remember your successes, where people liked you, where you enjoyed working. Remember what your friends think of you and your family. There is and always should be more to life than just work, but as we spend some much time doing it, we deserve to be happy in that environment.

Also remind your self that this is a situation you can learn from. You can learn just as much from people who are really bad as those that are really good – you learn how not to do it. If you ever find your self in a manager/boss situation you will remember all the things that you reacted badly to with your useless bosses and what motivated and inspired you.

At the end of the day, if can be successful with these strategies the new relationship you can grow with your boss could be amazing. Today employee tenure is not as long as it was in earlier generations. You have opportunities in life to meet and connect with numerous human beings, and, where ever possible, for his and happiness, one of them should certainly be your boss.

One (really) final idea I would also suggest is, if you are feeling dreadfully low is to put your head 'over the parapet'. Go and find another job, get to interview stage – even if you feel you are not planning to leave. It is such a great ego boost, you will go back to work feeling full of that powerful elixir – Confidence and (if you don't hand in your notice) feel fully able to put a strategy in place to change your daily work experience. By going through this process you will have realised that you do have choices, and for every human being, including your boss, finding yourself in a situation where you believe you don't have any choices is the most depressing of all.

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