

Are You a Toxic Boss? Take This Quiz!

By Brad Schwartz

I've just returned from the 2006 NAA Education Conference in Denver, CO, where I attended an interesting presentation entitled "Diagnosis and Treatment of the Toxic Boss Syndrome" by Mike Beirne, Executive Vice President of Kamson Corporation. Since toxic bosses affect numerous workplaces, I want to share my thoughts on this topic with The APTS readers.

As recruiters, we're afforded a unique look at why many people move from one company to another. With the average turnover in property management at a massive 50% per year, the top reasons we hear for wanting to switch companies are (in no particular order):

- No career growth
- Not enough money
- Inadequate benefits
- Problems with current boss or employer

Of all the reasons for high turnover, problems with a current boss or employer are often the easiest and least expensive to fix. In fact, if a toxic boss is causing high turnover, most times he or she is unaware that they are causing the problem.

What is a Toxic Boss?

It is hard to precisely define what a toxic boss is, but you sure know it when you have one. In simple terms, a toxic boss is a bad boss who poisons the work environment.

Using Fear as a Motivator

Toxic bosses operate on one principle: They do everything humanly possible to instill fear and intimidation in the workplace while destroying office morale, team building, and employee competence and confidence. These managers genuinely believe that fear, rather than respect, will produce better results from their people.

Toxic boss syndrome is a cyclical problem. For most toxic bosses, this is how they were treated throughout their careers, particularly at a first job. If you were managed by an abusive supervisor, it very likely becomes your most natural, comfortable method of management. Thus, the abused young professional "grows up" to be an abusive boss.

Using fear as a management style has devastating consequences. Unhappy employees may vent their frustrations by being rude to customers, performing poorly or quitting. Low morale will cause a decline in productivity and in the quality of service. Toxic bosses can face lawsuits for abusing employees. And people who work for abusive managers often have stress-related problems or illnesses and miss work due to symptoms.

Are You a Toxic Boss?

If you have unusually high turnover in your workplace, you may be a toxic boss. Take this simple self-assessment quiz to see if you fit the profile.

Do you...

1. Never praise your employees, but always criticize and publicly humiliate them?
2. Always take credit for your employees' ideas and work?
3. Never trust your employees? Maybe even have a personal snitch to report if anyone "gets out of line" while you are not around?
4. Don't care about the high turnover of employees?
5. Talk down to subordinate employees to constantly remind them of their lower status?
6. Continually reject new ideas or innovations because it may undermine your authority?
7. Keep secrets? Hold lots of closed-door scheming sessions to keep everyone thinking that you are important?

8. Micromanage? Monitor everything, including emails, phone calls, office supplies, maybe even photocopies?
9. Refuse to learn from mistakes because changing your mind is a sign of weakness?
10. Believe that fear and intimidation on the job are more important than respect?

If you answered “yes” more than “no”, pay close attention: You are a toxic boss.

Ok, I'm a Toxic Boss. Now What?

While there is no easy solution to instantly change you from abusive to affable, here are some tips to start your transformation:

- Expect the best from your people. When they know that you expect great things from them, they will be challenged by that expectation and work hard to live up to it.
- Build cohesive teams, with you serving as the team's captain. The team captain inspires excellence and must earn loyalty. Be a role model to be admired, not feared.
- When faced with a new project or troubling dilemma, ask for input from your employees. Truly listen and keep an open mind. These people are on the ground floor and can provide invaluable insight.
- Focus on your employees' potential when working together. Support them and guide them on their paths to success.
- Work on your delegation skills by surrounding yourself with talented people that you respect. Then you would be unwise not to use them to the best of their abilities.
- Give your people responsibility (delegate, not dump) and make sure they have the resources to do the job. Never be punitive when they make mistakes.
- When mistakes happen, don't pass the blame down. It's your department and you are ultimately responsible for its failures and successes. You will gain trust and respect from your team.
- Give your employees credit for successes. Never take credit for a subordinate's work and be sure to mention names at each opportunity. Each triumph will, in turn, reflect on your excellent supervisory skills.

Your behavior as a manager has a direct impact on staff performance, productivity, satisfaction and turnover. Toxic boss syndrome will cause the slow, painful death of your workplace and ultimately, your career.

Keep Sending Me Your Questions

Each month, my column will focus on a recruitment or retention question or concern facing our property management industry, as submitted by THE APTS readers. Tell me which issues affect your company. What is important to you? Keep your questions coming and email me at brad@msbresources.com.

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