

How to handle a



workaholic boss

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Everyone wants to work for a devoted leader. But there’s a difference between a diligent work ethic and a supervisor who arrives long before everyone else, leaves long afterward, and never seems to stop thinking about work.

Maybe you’re being bombarded with emails at all hours of the day and night, or maybe you feel like you can’t sneak out for a coffee without catching a sideways glare. Either way, it can be difficult to go through life under the watchful eye of a workaholic boss.

“Unfortunately, a workaholic boss will usually expect the same,” said Wendy Giuffre, president of [Wendy Ellen Inc.](#) “That’s a tough one. It really is.”

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Work harder

Hey, let's just get this out of the way: the flip side of a boss who works too hard is an employee who might not be working hard enough.

So before pursuing other strategies for mitigating the problem, endure some clear-eyed self-reflection about your own performance. Are you giving your all? Or are you part of the reason your supervisor's so stressed?

"Sometimes a 'workaholic' just has high expectations," pointed out Cissy Pau, principal consultant at [Clear HR Consulting](#). "Maybe you're lazy? I say that jokingly, but if they're asking you to respond to things during the day and you're just like, 'I'm too busy,' – that's not OK."

Inquire about expectations

Just because your boss never leaves her office or shuts her phone off for the night doesn't mean she necessarily expects you to be similarly zealous.

Not every supervisor expects you to keep up with their intensity. Has your boss expressly criticized you about your hours or availability, or are you projecting?

"If she's sending you emails at night, does she expect a response at that time? Or if he's getting in early at 6 o'clock every morning, does he expect you to do the same?" Pau wondered.

"Sometimes workaholics are just trying to get information off the plate – but they're not necessarily expecting you to jump



If you're sure your supervisor's indefatigable work rate is putting strains on your life, it's time to have a direct conversation.

"It's really important to express to your boss that you intend to do the best job you can, but that you need to set some boundaries and you hope you will be judged on your performance, not the number of hours that you're at your desk or answering your phone," said Lee Weisser, senior career counsellor and life coach at [Careers by Design](#).

"Just emphasize that you're doing a good job and you intend to do a good job, but you're not available to answer your phone after a certain time."

Still, experts warn that if your boss has the wrong temperament, a conversation like this could affect how you're perceived. So tread lightly.

"Oftentimes, having that conversation with your boss could be detrimental – that's the reality of it," Giuffre said. "You have to be brave enough to have that conversation and be aware of the potential consequences."

Stay grounded

If your boss truly is the obsessive type, that stress could trickle down to everyone working below.

"Try not to absorb the anxiety of the boss," Weisser advised. "That kind of workaholic behaviour usually goes along with somebody who's very anxious about getting things done in a certain time frame, or just somebody who can't manage their



whatever works for you – you need to find ways to stay calm, centred, and not absorb that negative energy.”

Find a more suitable situation

If you and your boss have dramatically different ideas about work-life balance and the amount of time and energy you should be devoting to your job, it’s possible that gap simply can’t be bridged.

Rather than continuing in a situation where you resent your boss and your boss in return is unhappy with your performance, it might be better in the long run to try to transfer to an environment that better suits your work habits and lifestyle.

“If it doesn’t change, **you’re going to be looking elsewhere**,” Giuffre said. “Because most of the time, people don’t quit a job – they quit their supervisor.”



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