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Career Coach: Screening Out Bad Bosses in Job Interviews

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By Clare Trapasso

How can job seekers tell if the manager interviewing them would be a good person to work under? *Responses have been edited for clarity and concision.*



Melissa Llarena

Executive coach Melissa Llarena owns New York–based Career Outcomes, which offers job-interview coaching to financial services professionals.

One way that you can tell someone is going to be a bad boss is if they take over the conversation and do not let you get in a word in edgewise. It means they [may] not be open to your ideas. If someone keeps interrupting you during the interview constantly, then that's just a sign of how their interpersonal skills will play out on the job.

If they don't know anything about you, if they didn't take the time to at least skim your résumé or ask someone who had a conversation in [human resources] with you ... that's a sign that they might not really take recruiting talent as seriously as they should.

If they are, for whatever reason, being curt with a receptionist ... that gives you a sense of how they treat people around them.

You can tell a bad boss if they are not respectful of your time. If the meeting was scheduled for 3 to 4 p.m. and it goes over by an hour and the boss never asks you if you can stay longer, then that's a sign that they don't value your time. It could be an indication of how they would treat you as an employee. [But] it might tell you that somebody is excited about the company, really enjoys their job and ... just lost track of time.

Step one is knowing what you ... want out of a boss. Ask precisely the questions that matter to your happiness in the workplace.



Steve Fleming

Steve Fleming is the CEO of Wall Street Options, a recruiting firm specializing in financial services that is based in New York.

[A] sign of a bad boss is someone who doesn't listen. They should be an active listener.

Being too intense or too laid-back or aloof [is a warning sign.] If there's a lack of interest in the way they're proposing the opportunity, it's negative.

How someone presents themselves [is another indicator.] Are they a slob or neat and organized? Are they on their BlackBerry or their iPhone during a meeting? That's rude.

How they describe the company and the position and how they sell it to you, if it comes off with a negative tone or a certain arrogance ... could be an identifier of someone [you] don't want to work for.

Negative comments about employees or derogatory comments about competitors, that's a bad sign. That's not what a winner does or a confident person would do.

Setting expectations to be too difficult to even do the job is a ... sign of a bad boss. [If] there's too much in the role to actually get it done, that could be bad management. It could be the economy being so bad they're combining two jobs into one.



Stacy Cheriff

Stacy Cheriff is an executive recruiter at New York-based Compliance Search and specializes in asset management.

The boss from hell, often in the interviewing process, comes across really well. They know what people want to hear and they can be extremely charming. If they seem nice enough and reasonable enough and on point, I don't think you can tell whether you'll have problems later.

If you get a bad feeling, listen to your gut. Don't let this desire to have this job override this sneaking bad feeling.

[LinkedIn](#) is your best friend. See who has reported to them in the recent past, call them up and talk to them. You want to do it [over the phone] so they'll feel more comfortable speaking freely. You reach out to people

who are no longer working there and have left within a year. You need to speak to enough people to know if they're accurate or if they have an ax to grind.

When you do your initial outreach to them, you say, "I'm considering taking a job at X working with Mr. Y. I was wondering if I could talk to you about your experiences working there. I'll only take five minutes of your time."

What you're looking for are big themes. Is this person a micromanager? Is this person a psychopath? The crazier an atmosphere is, the more likely people are to be open to reminiscing.