

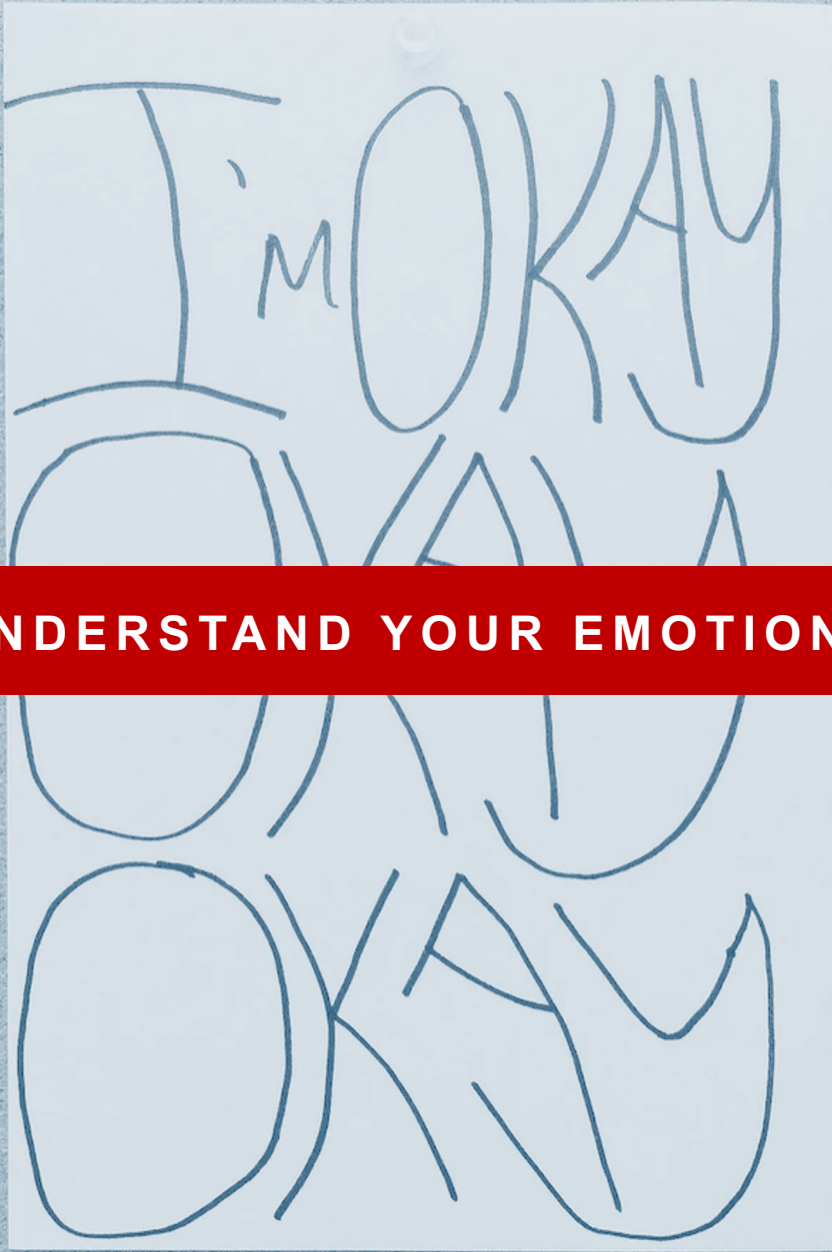


KATE EDWARDS
& COMPANY

The Toxic Leadership

TOOLKIT

**NAVIGATING TOXICITY
IN THE WORKPLACE**



UNDERSTAND YOUR EMOTIONS

Know you're *not alone*

Your Feelings are Okay

Even though these toxic leaders are doing terrible things, you may question your feelings. But your feelings of dismay, fear or indignation are correct, these folks are out of line!

Your Feelings are Understandable

No one should be minimized, made to feel insecure, or threatened at work. This is inappropriate professional behavior. Your feelings are a reaction to a situation that is unfair and even manipulative.

Finding the Way Forward

Let's look at what Toxic Leadership is and the avenues for protecting yourself....

There is no *Silver Bullet...*

Unfortunately, there isn't a simple approach to working with – or calling out – a toxic leader, so it's important to understand if:

- This is one toxic leader acting alone
- This leader is upholding the existing toxicity in the company culture

Then you must look at yourself: how long have you been there and what is your level in the hierarchy? Are you contributing to a toxic environment? And ask yourself honestly: is it possible to make change? Or is it best to move on?

These are big questions so let's start with...



Identifying toxic behaviors

KNOW THE SIGNS

Demeaning Behaviors

Laughs, calls out mistakes, puts you on the spot, dismisses inputs, insults your work.

Intimidating Body Language

Domineering eye contact, gets too close, grabs, pushes, throws or hits things (or people).

Manipulates Data

Speaks over you, misrepresents your position to others, highlights your mistakes, changes the facts.

Disrespects People and Things

Throws away good product, destroys the team's work, puts the blame on others, talks over you.

Habits run *deep*

Toxic behaviors take years to build and come from a few sources:

- Early childhood trauma: “I learned at an early age that life is unfair”
- Fear of being taken advantage of: “That won’t happen to me”
- Having bad professional mentors who exemplified toxic behaviors: “That seemed to work, and I don’t know a better way”

As you consider what to do, you must take the above into consideration. Deeply ingrained habits are very hard to change. Does this person have a good reason to change? Change will only happen if the organization supports and calls for it.

These are big questions so let’s consider...

What's the *source?*

IS IT THE ORGANIZATION?

Is the toxicity upheld and emulated throughout the operation? Is there a culture of toxic leadership?

IS IT MY BOSS?

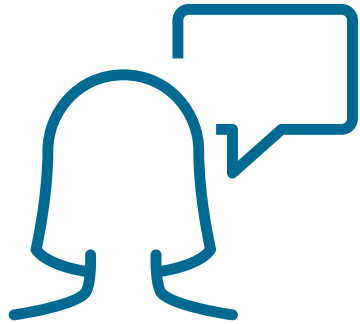
Is your boss embedded in this organization or acting alone? Have they been there a long time or are they new?

IS IT ME?

Uh oh. I think it may be me.
But I've only had toxic bosses and have built some terrible habits...now what?

Toxic Leadership

questions to consider

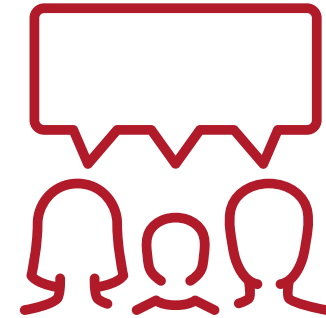


WHEN IT'S YOUR BOSS

What is their
role & level?

What's their
tenure?

What's your
tenure?

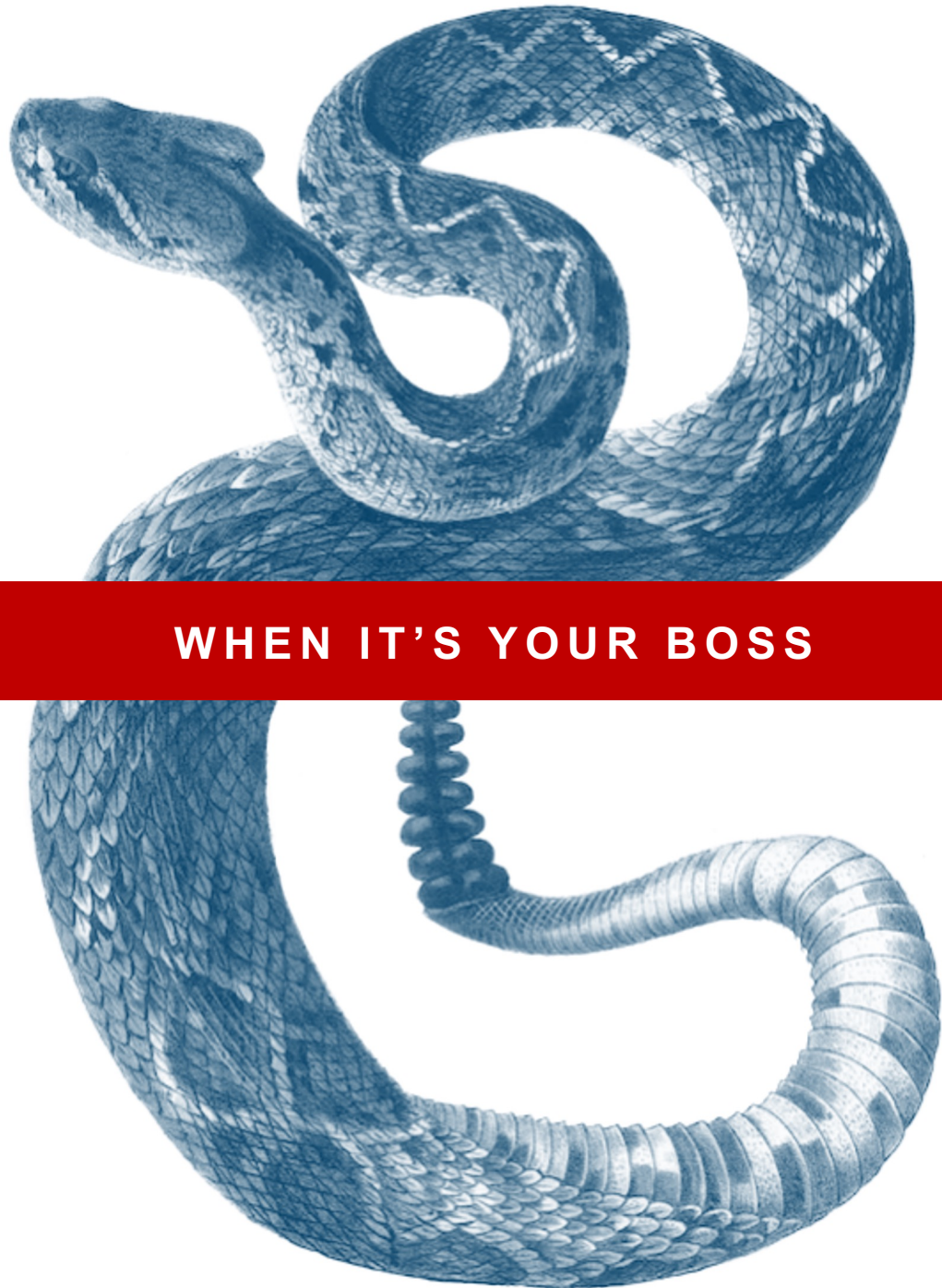


WHEN IT'S YOUR ORGANIZATION

Does it come
from the top?

Is everyone
complicit?

What's the
reality?



WHEN IT'S YOUR BOSS

Toxic Leadership *considerations*

What is their role & level?

What is their role in the company and how deeply rooted are they? Are they your direct supervisor or a level up? It's important to know this so you can determine next steps.

What's their tenure? Your tenure?

If you're a new manager and they have been there forever, it might be hard to raise your hand. Or, if they're new and the culture has had clear standards it might be a good idea to speak up.

Consider:

You might not be able to stop the behavior. So, the question is: will you be supported if you report the behavior to another leader/HR?

Toxic Boss

case study

Jada was with her company for 3 years and was recognized as a rockstar director. Her new boss, a VP, was new to the company and within a few months he began to demonstrate toxic behaviors towards Jada. He regularly left her off communication so that she would look bad in meetings because she didn't have the correct information, then he would laugh and call her "silly" or "cute" to demean her. He then actively prevented her from getting a raise that his boss said was hers, and when Jada questioned it, he told her "I don't have to give you a raise, since you're just a girl."

Jada conferred with another senior leader who encouraged her to report the toxic behavior to upper management. After some tenuous weeks of deliberation, and Jada having to speak up more than once, the toxic boss was let go.

Elements that led to Jada staying:

- Jada had **tenure** with the company; she was a respected member of the team.
- The company had always demonstrated **high moral standards**; Jada tested this by conferring with her colleague and seeking internal counsel before acting alone.
- She took a risk they would favor him because he was at a higher level, but her **dedication to the company** and consistent growth helped her make her case.



Toxic Leadership *considerations*

WHEN IT'S THE ORGANIZATION

Does it come from the top?

If the Owner/CEO/GM/Chef is a toxic leader, they may surround themselves with like-minded people to uphold their leadership style. They also have the power to let people go who disagree.

Is everyone complicit?

Is it just your direct supervisor or is the toxic culture represented at other levels too? Often, bad behavior is overlooked because the upper-level leadership is comfortable with this way of working.

What's the reality?

If you're working in a toxic organization, it's unlikely you will be supported in asking for better. So, the question is: is this the place for you?

Toxic Organization

case study

Cody was an executive sous chef at a high-level organization. He liked his job; the place was busy, and he was paid very well. But his direct boss, the Chef de Cuisine, had recently been promoted and began demonstrating toxic behaviors towards Cody. He singled Cody out and put mistakes on him that weren't his. When Cody would stand up for himself, he was mocked and called a baby in front of others. The CDC held Cody to a standard that he didn't hold himself to and would throw Cody under the bus to the GM to make up for his own shortcomings and sloppiness. Cody spoke to others on the team; they supported him in private but in public supported their boss. He considered going to the GM and HR, but the GM also demonstrated toxic behaviors and HR fell in line behind the GM. Cody had to decide: stay and overlook the behavior or leave and find a job at an organization that was more in alignment with his personal code of ethics?

Elements that led to Cody leaving:

- Both Cody and the CDC had the **same tenure** and were both valued by the company.
- The company had always demonstrated **a longstanding tolerance for toxic behavior**; Cody was the only one raising his hand with his peers and couldn't find public support at his level or above.
- By staying, he was **agreeing to overlook the behavior** that was troubling to him. So, his decision was to leave and seek an operation that **shared his values**.



Navigating your *Toxic behaviors*

WHEN IT'S YOU

Where did you learn these habits?

If you've only worked in toxic environments, then you may have deeply ingrained beliefs about how to lead others. So, you must be honest: are you willing to learn new skills and build new habits?

Are you capable of change?

Do the toxic behaviors you utilize make you feel bad/guilty/unhappy? Then you likely can work on creating change. If you're unsure, then you might require the support of a coach or professional.

Consider:

If you're ready to change and build new skills, you can...it's about expecting better from yourself. Go online, read articles & books, and adopt the skills found in empowered leadership. It's possible to change when you have clear options.

When You're the Toxic Leader

case study

Sam was the Executive Chef at a high-volume catering operation. They were sent to a coach to help them create better leadership habits; if they couldn't, they would be let go. Sam shared with their coach that they had worked for many demeaning, aggressive, and toxic chefs and, in turn, hated how they felt working for them. But they were utilizing the same behaviors with their team and felt hopeless because they didn't have better options. Once they discovered new leadership options, they began adopting these new methods and began to enjoy the aspects of leadership they had never explored before (training, mentoring, delegating, empowering others to be creative). Their team immediately responded to this improved way of leading, but the team was wary, was this for real? In order to prove their intentions were good they had to apologize to their team and when they slipped back into their old ways, they had to actively state that they wanted to stay at this operation and could improve.

Elements that led to Sam staying:

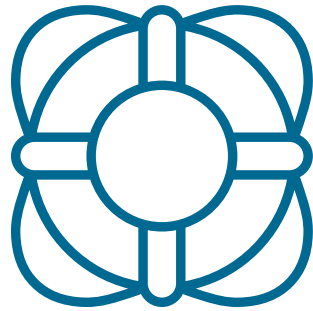
- Sam **was committed to change** and learn some improved leadership methods.
- Sam **took responsibility** for their toxic behaviors; owning it was painful but helpful in the end.
- Sam accepted outside support and **was honest about their toxic behaviors** that had served them for many years. They actively demonstrated humility and that they were working hard to do better.



*The quality of a leader
is reflected in the standards
he sets for himself.*

RAY CROC

Speaking up & *staying safe*



SPEAK UP IF:

...you're supported by the company culture

...you have tenure and have a record of consistency

...you have an ally who can support your claim



BE CAREFUL IF:

...you're alone in your thoughts and feelings

...your company turns a blind eye to toxicity

...your boss can retaliate and put your job in peril

What you can say *if you speak up*

Once you decide that it's safe for you to speak up, **you can respond directly to the toxic leader** (or colleague) when they are out of line. Just know that this person may mock you for saying something, but by speaking up, you're stating that you are no longer accepting of this behavior. Options include:

- "I don't appreciate that."
- "That doesn't work for me."
- "I'm uncomfortable with your (behavior/action) and I need you to stop."

And some options for what you can say **when you approach upper management** about your situation:

- "I've been experiencing (xyz behavior) from (person). I've told them I'm uncomfortable with their actions/words but they're not stopping. I need your support."
- "Recently, I've had trouble with (person) and it's affecting my work. They consistently do (xyz) and I'm having trouble focusing on my job because it is offensive and relentless. I need you to intervene, this is not a good situation for me*."

*make sure you have catalogued the instances of toxic behavior with dates and have witnesses if possible.

Understand *your reactions*

Your reactions might surprise you

When you're threatened or mocked in public your reactions may range from hostility to hilarity, from shutting down to joining in. We must be aware that we're reacting based on our own deeply ingrained experience with these kinds of situations and the reaction might not represent us well.

It's essential to become aware of yourself and your natural reactions. You are hardwired to respond in the above ways. So, it's important to get ahead of your reactions by doing the following:

- Prepare prior to going to work. Get yourself in the mindset of not fighting fire with fire but in staying calm and representing yourself in a positive way.
- Breathe. Take a pause before responding. Hold your own.
- Calm yourself and say nothing. Respond only if this will help you stay above the toxicity. No sense in joining in, it probably won't help your situation.

In the end *it's your choice:*



**TO SPEAK
UP OR**
stay quiet



**TO STAY
OR LEAVE**
this organization



**TO NOTICE
OR ADJUST**
your own reactions



**TO INVOLVE
OTHERS***
and gain support

Not every toxic environment can change nor is every boss is going to be toxic forever. There are many considerations when making change on a personal or organizational level.

** Involving others is essential when you are considering addressing a toxic situation AND when you are the toxic person. We all need support when we're taking a stand and when we decide to change, grow, and evolve our behaviors.*

*What works
for
YOU?*



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