

# The coworker (or boss) from hell

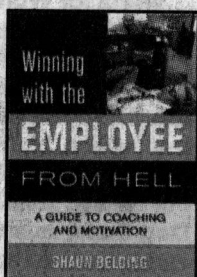
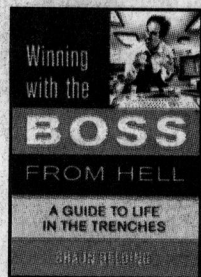
Experts say most workplaces have conflict — and that's OK

By Aimee Heckel  
Camera staff writer

It may come in the form of blatantly shooting down your ideas in meetings, or an honest clash of personalities.

Other times, a problematic person in the workplace hides behind a passive-aggressive smile, right before they silently, yet intentionally, remove a slide from your big presentation, or "forget" to tell you about an important phone call.

For Jess Feavel, of Boulder, her "coworker from hell" seemed pleasant enough, as the older woman worked her way up the ranks to manager of a



Courtesy ECW Press

Shaun Belding's books offer tips on how to deal with a tough coworker, boss or employee.

burger joint.

Feavel, then 16, says she was shocked when she found out her coworker had lied her way to the top.

The woman had also fabricated her own son's death so she could get time off work, and held a fake memorial service at her house so sympathetic

## Online

- Workplace Bullying Institute. [www.bullyinginstitute.org](http://www.bullyinginstitute.org)
- Badbossology.com. [www.badbossology.com](http://www.badbossology.com)
- Vent and share your workplace horror stories here. [www.jobschmob.com](http://www.jobschmob.com)

coworkers would give her money.

Feavel says the woman was eventually fired for lying and stealing money from the company.

"She was the best actress ever," Feavel says. "She blew us all away."

You can't predict or know how to handle all nightmarish coworkers and bosses, says Feavel, now 22. But she says she's had other supervisors who perpetuated improper behavior and discrimination by not stopping it.

The majority of American workers are conflict-avoiders who don't realize

that doing nothing is doing something, according to Audrey Nelson, a doctor and Boulder-based corporate communication consultant and trainer.

Nelson estimates about 75 percent of work environments have some degree of conflict — "And that's OK," she says. "Don't be afraid of conflict."

What matters is how you deal with it, she says.

Experts in workplace conflict resolution, such as Shaun Belding, say many employees underestimate their own potential to help shape their workplace, including their interactions with difficult people there. Belding, of Canada, wrote the books "Winning with the Boss from Hell" and "Winning with the Employee from Hell."

"Don't underestimate how much control you have over your own satisfaction," he says. See **EXPERTS, 8D**

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## Faces of the coworker from hell

*A difficult coworker might come in the form of a time-waster, a know-it-all or a political jockey, who sucks up to the boss to try to climb the ladder. Here are a few others, and tips on how to deal with them:*

**The Back-Stabber** — These people spread rumors, but act nice to your face. Back-Stabbers count on hiding out, so the best way to deal is to confront them. Name their game. And then cover your back, and make sure your supervisor hears the truth from you. (Nelson.)

**The Passive-Aggressor** — These workers deliberately or subconsciously sabotage the workplace and hurt others instead of handling issues head-on. If you don't like your job, dust off your resume and circulate it. Or talk through your problems honestly. (Doctor Audrey Nelson, Boulder-based corporate communication consultant and trainer.)

**The Idea-Stealer** — If a coworker steals your idea innocently, a brief and light-hearted private comment can work. If a coworker maliciously steals your idea, also start with a quick, light comment. Then lock and protect your documents the best you can; document when your ideas are stolen; and don't tell people your

ideas until you are going to use them. Then, tell everyone. If the problem continues, talk to your boss. (Shaun Belding, author of "Winning with the Boss From Hell.")

**The Avoider** — These workers avoid conversation because they are afraid of conflict. Instead, they get resentful or put work on other people. But the most important part in alleviating and preventing a nasty work environment is communication. If needed, seek help, either from a boss, professional or mediator. (Celia Sinoway, psychologist at the University of Colorado in Boulder.)

**The Evil E-mailer** — These people try to use e-mail as a conflict-management tool because they are afraid or not sure how to communicate face-to-face. If you write a hurtful e-mail, wait an hour before sending it. Better yet, talk in person. People say things in e-mail they would not say face-to-face. (Nelson.)

**The Ain't-It-Awful** — These people play the victim card, and waste time and energy complaining about how bad they've got it. "The pig loves it when you get in the mud and get dirty with them," Nelson says. Don't give them the pity they seek.

**The Fault-Finder** — What-

ever you do, these people find something wrong and tell you about it. Call them out on their actions — and their suspected motivations. If they're mad because you got a promotion, ask if they would like to talk about it.

**Debbie Downer** — These workers are cynical, negative and judgmental. Feed them their own medicine. Show them you are not interested in their behavior by replying to their comments with lightly sarcastic responses, such as, "Thank you for that inspirational moment." Don't scold them. You can't change them, but you can show them that they cannot act like that around you. (Belding.)

### Faces of the boss from hell

**The Pile-On Boss** — This boss demands more work with less resources (money, staff). Slowly, but surely, set your boundaries, and learn to say, "No."

An overloaded employee who can't control the big picture should focus on controlling the smaller picture. Learn to manage your own expectations and understand what is doable and in your control. Then do your best. Set goals for yourself that

you can achieve daily. Then manage others' expectations. Don't make promises you can't keep, and give others realistic expectations of you. (Belding.)

**The Ghost** — This boss does not explain expectations, duties or provide resources to complete the job. You should sit down and talk. Ask him or her to clarify expectations and what you can do to be more successful. Enlist a mediator, if necessary. (Sinoway.)

**The Critic** — This boss is quick to criticize, but slow to praise. The next time your boss criticizes you, try this: Apologize. Let him or her know you will correct it. And follow with a comment gently reminding him or her that you do, occasionally, do things right. Something like, "And I thought you were coming over to compliment that last project I worked on." Say it with a smile. (Belding.)

**The Bully** — The most prevalent kind of problematic boss. Bullies rule by abusing power. They humiliate you, invade your boundaries, threaten, get loud, are forceful, intimidating and scary. If the bully yells, don't act like a coward. Don't let the bully have his or her way. Behavior that is reinforced will be repeated. Don't provide the payoff. (Nelson.)