

## TOO MUCH MONEY, BAD BOSSES, AND OTHER WORKPLACE QUESTIONS ANSWERED



### Too Much Money

#### Bad Bosses

#### Negative Information in Your Personnel File

#### Too Much Money

Dear Genie,

*I feel really guilty because I think I'm unjustly overpaid. What should I do?*

Sincerely,

Not Worthy

Dear Not,

Have a drink of water. It'll pass.

#### Bad Bosses

Dear Genie,

*I love my company, but I hate my boss and it's making me hate my job. It's not that we just don't see eye to eye; it's worse: he's petty, irrational and nasty, and he asks me to do a lot of personal work for him that's outside of my job description. What should I do?*

Sincerely,

Hot and Cold

Dear Hot,

Unfortunately, yours is not an uncommon situation, and it's sometimes futile to expect your lousy boss to change, no matter what tactics you try. You do, however, have several options. Most importantly, always remember: **No one has the right to treat an employee with disrespect, and you do not have to tolerate irrational, mean and/or inappropriate behavior.** This does not mean standing on soap boxes, screaming back and issuing ultimatums. It does mean, however, that when your boss screams at you, you can say, calmly and with dignity, "I would be happy to discuss this situation with you, Bob, but not while you're screaming at me. Please let me know when you're ready to talk about this more calmly." Or, when your boss asks you to type, print and send out a 500 person mailing overnight on behalf of the political candidate she's supporting (as mine once did), you can say, "Susan, you know that when it comes to company business I'm always happy to help you in any way I can, but this is personal work and it's not part of my job." Although it's scary to lay down the law with your employer, it is important for you to set limits on how you are willing to be treated. Usually, putting your foot down will stop the inappropriate behavior. It is possible, however, that speaking up for yourself could lead to you getting fired. But ask yourself, do you really want to work for someone who treats you so badly?

It helps to have an ally in the firm—ideally someone higher up than your boss—who is aware of the situation and sympathetic to you. However, it can be difficult to confide in your boss's boss without seeming like a whiner and often, even if your boss's superior is on your side, he/she won't do anything to help you because, let's face it, most companies will feel that your boss is more important than you are.

So what can you do? If setting limits doesn't work and your boss's boss can't or won't help you have two choices: stick it out and wait for your boss—or you—to be promoted or transferred; or start looking for another job. But **do not** let the situation go on so long that you start to lose self-confidence and feel bad about yourself. It's just not worth it.

#### Negative Information in Your Personnel File

Dear Genie,

*What can you do if you know or suspect that a prior boss is giving an untrue evaluation of you? Also, what are the laws about having negative information on your file?*

Preserving My Good Name

Dear Preserving,

Unfortunately, there isn't a whole lot you can do about ex-employers who are giving you a bad rap. From a legal standpoint, employers can be sued for defamation if what they say about you is untrue and they know it is untrue. The latter point is usually hard to prove, and so these kinds of cases are usually hard won. Nonetheless, because of fear of costly litigation, these days many companies embrace a non-committal policy regarding past employees. In other words, when asked to provide a reference for a former employee, companies will state only the employee's dates of employment and offer no opinions of the employee's performance, positive or negative.

[Top](#)

[Top](#)

Therefore, even if you have no intention of filing suit, if you do suspect that a past employer is criticizing you unfairly, you can have a lawyer write a strong letter asserting that you are being defamed. The threat of legal action may be enough to stop the comments. Also, it goes without saying that you should try to find other references. If you don't have experience with other companies, think about whether there is another manager at the "problem" firm who would give you a positive recommendation.

As for laws regarding negative information on your file, most states entitle employees access to their personnel files while they are still employed by the company. However, few states entitle access once you've left the firm. And, for better or worse, there's no expiration date on personnel information, so if you do have something negative in your file, it will remain there until the file is retired to storage.

**Top**

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