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Tangling With Tyrants: Managing the Balance of Power at Work

Tony Deblauwe
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At some point in their careers, most people will work for a boss they consider to be a tyrant. Like Miranda Priestly, the nasty magazine editor in *The Devil Wears Prada*, these bosses manage through humiliation, backstabbing, or other coercive means of engaging cooperation.

Tangling With Tyrants guides readers on overcoming conflict with their boss at work. Deblauwe is an experienced human resources professional and certified career coach who has advised individuals and organizations on handling people management issues. He sees increased stress in the workplace, due to more global competition and fewer resources to handle the workload. Using examples of tyrants in action from his own experience and behavioral models he developed, he shares his knowledge of how to identify and deal professionally with a tyrant boss.

The book advises readers not to try to interpret a tyrant's motivations or make assumptions that the person is intentionally being mean. Unknown external factors can trigger tyrant behaviors. "Learning to see past the behavior and understand the context of what may be fueling it is a critical change in thinking," Deblauwe writes.

The book's introduction gives readers the opportunity to rate their boss's behavior to determine if the boss exhibits true tyrant characteristics. The next few chapters help readers understand how they react to tyrant behaviors and how to take control of a situation with a tyrant boss. The author developed the HCC (Hoping, Coping, Compromise) model to illustrate what happens when a person feels unable to challenge a tyrant boss. He shows readers how to avoid the HCC cycle of helplessness and take control by suppressing emotional reactions and outlining a preliminary action plan. Checklists and exercises at the end of each chapter help readers assess their situation and provide techniques for improving communication. Chapter six gives good advice on how workers can effectively use various types of power to their advantage in dealing with their bosses. "This is the real power—the power of the right attitude to approach conflict with professionalism." Chapter nine explains the G.R.A.C.E. model Deblauwe developed to foster better communication with one's boss, such as validating the boss's point of view, and includes a sample conversation between a boss and subordinate that illustrates the steps in the process. The seven common approaches to handling a tyrant boss in chapter ten are particularly useful and candid, especially the pros and cons listed for each approach.

The author's writing style is conversational and the book's brevity is good for those who want a quick and easy read. Complex subjects such as communication styles and methods of power are summarized briefly, however, without much detail or examples, so readers may want to consult additional resources for more information on dealing with style conflict and how people with various communication styles can interact with each other more effectively.

Tangling With Tyrants offers hope and alternatives for people who may think quitting is the only option for dealing with a bad boss.
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