



TANGLING WITH TYRANTS[®]

MANAGING THE BALANCE OF POWER AT WORK

Foreword by Susan Futterman Author of *When You Work for a Bully*

BY TONY DEBLAUWE

Tangling with Tyrants®

Managing the Balance of Power at Work

By

Tony Deblauwe



Published by PageFree Publishing
PO Box 23
Otsego, MI 49078

Tangling with Tyrants®: Managing the Balance of Power at Work

ISBN: 1-58961-577-8 Paperback
1-58961-578-6 Hardcover

LC Control Number: 2008910955

Copyright © 2006 by Tony Deblauwe

Cover art by The Net Men Corp (www.thenetmencorp.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photography, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

PageFree Publishing books are available online and in bookstores. To contact PageFree directly visit www.pagefreepublishing.com

Printed in the United States of America.

PB Printing

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Forewordv
Introduction1
Chapter 1	Emotions and Work.....6
Chapter 2	Enter the Tyrant.....14
Chapter 3	Hoping, Coping, and Compromise.....22
Chapter 4	Looking in the Mirror—the Recipient profile32
Chapter 5	What you know and what you think you know—Exploring Assumptions.....38
Chapter 6	Politics of Power.....49
Chapter 7	Process Orientation— Thinking in terms of Solutions.....58
Chapter 8	Process to Partnership—How to Communicate Effectively69
Chapter 9	Participant profile and the Art of G.R.A.C.E.©.....78

Chapter 10 Choosing the Right Approach.....90

Chapter 11 Exit Strategy.....102

Chapter 12 Practice Makes Perfect.....109

Final Thoughts.....114

Resources118

Foreword

Tony Deblauwe's book, *Tangling with Tyrants*[®], is a welcome addition to the (too slowly) growing body of practical and effective strategies for dealing with toxic managers and workplaces.

Tony combines personal insights with his experience as a human resources professional, offering readers strategies for recognizing and dealing with "Tyrants." His book furnishes employees with a guide to understanding how their own behaviors and attitudes can, wittingly or unwittingly, mitigate or exacerbate friction between them and their managers.

Through the use of examples and short practical exercises, *Tangling with Tyrants*[®] offers readers specific techniques for managing their manager where practical, for getting the job done despite their managers, for avoiding the emotional battering that working with a toxic manager can often precipitate—and for moving on where needed.

While some Tyrants are indeed nasty people, others are not. As Tony accurately points out, these folks are not necessarily malicious or out to "get" their subordinates. They may instead simply be badly trained, poorly suited to their positions, under pressure from their own managers or unaware of the impact that they're having on their subordinates.

Indeed, as Tony also points out, the issue may not be one of “Tyrant” versus victim, but simply one of differing styles. There the choice becomes learning to modify style to work effectively with the manager, or moving on to a manager whose style complements your own.

In short, *Tangling with Tyrants*® offers a practical, level-headed approach to dealing effectively with interpersonal problems in the workplace.

—Susan Futterman
Author, *When You Work for a Bully*

Introduction

The most common workplace problem people approach me about begins with an emotionally charged statement that sounds something like this:

Help! My boss is driving me crazy!

If you work for a bad boss, you can relate to this statement. It seems the workplace is becoming tougher and tougher and bad managers are cropping up everywhere. Employees are stressed and find it hard to know what to do about the conflict surrounding a difficult and demanding boss.

Think about the current relationship between you and your boss. Does it energize and heighten your job performance, or is it stressful, frustrating or non-existent? Does your boss offer you praise and recognition or more work and no interaction? Worse—does your boss attack your value or worth? If daily conflict with your boss brings your productivity and sanity to the brink of disaster, you probably work for a Tyrant.

Work attitude surveys show that the employee-manager relationship is the most important part in determining satisfaction at work; even more than pay or benefits. Working for a bad manager is so common that the subject is satirized in popular culture. Just look at *Dilbert*®, *The Office* and *Office Space*.

Your reality, unfortunately, isn't humorous. I will share with you my knowledge of how to deal with a Tyrant boss. You'll learn how

to develop a communication process that will restore your power and reduce the conflict that exists with your boss.

Throughout my career in Human Resources, I have experienced both sides of Tyrant management behavior as a coach and as an employee. I know first-hand how a Tyrant's dysfunctional behavior can leave a trail of carnage including crushed morale, turnover, and stress leave. I have gone through many personal moments where I struggled to balance professional conduct with feelings of anger and despair. This balancing act of my personal feelings, combined with hearing the horror stories from employees who worked under a Tyrant, made it a challenge for me to stay focused on my job.

I remember many instances where Tyrant behavior not only impacted performance in a department, but the company's competitive advantage. During the peak of the dot-com frenzy, keeping employees was a top priority. HR departments in top companies struggled to keep up with the talent drain entering start-ups and soon, lack of a talent pipeline forced people to do more with less. The work atmosphere deteriorated between employees and management. As people left, I expected to hear their reason for leaving was pay and stock. That was the case for some, but most of the employees who quit cited issues with their boss as the trigger to look for a new job. Their experiences ranged from one boss who never came into the office or followed up on any work projects, to a boss who was a fierce micro-manager and cursed at the staff around deadlines. I was stunned. As alluring as the start-up environment was at the time, it was bad boss behavior that spurred the desire for people to leave.

The experience taught me that a huge priority, if not the priority, for people to feel good about their job depends on one critical area—the relationship with their boss. That's why I wrote this book. I want to give you the tools you need to approach your boss differently and get the results you want. It doesn't matter how bad your boss is—this book will help you avoid the HR office and provide you with real solutions.

Do I work for a Tyrant?

To separate the occasional “moments” when your boss exhibits disruptive behavior versus that of a Tyrant, rate the relationship with your boss in the following quiz.

Scale: (1) Never (2) Seldom (3) Time-to-Time
(4) Often (5) Always

- ___ Compliments you on a job well done
- ___ Collaborates with you on work tasks and projects
- ___ Offers balanced feedback (positive and constructive)
- ___ Is interested in your development
- ___ Communicates clearly what is expected of you
- ___ Provides adequate work/life balance
- ___ Is generally concerned for your well being
- ___ Models leadership qualities
- ___ Listens effectively
- ___ Communicates in the moment—free of distractions
- ___ Speaks to you; not at you or down to you
- ___ Provides motivation
- ___ Is open to criticism and personal feedback
- ___ Is open to others ideas
- ___ Makes work fun as well as challenging

Add up your scores and find out how you boss did using the scale below:

75-68: Great boss! (Congratulations!)

68-60: Solid performing manager with a few quirks from time-to-time, but okay to deal with; no major issues

60-53: Warning! Possible Tyrant in training

53-below: TYRANT!

How did your boss do? If you confirmed you work for Tyrant, don't worry because this book is your guide to change. Reporting to a Tyrant boss eats away at your self-image, sanity and more importantly, your power. Left to Tyrant devices, your capacity for maintaining a healthy balance of power dwindles as you slip into complementary behaviors to try and deal with your boss's behavior. Usually Tyrant bosses don't realize how they are acting and we don't always realize how our thinking or behavior is enabling their power position.

What can I do?

What would it mean to you if you learned how to improve your ability to communicate effectively with your boss and increase your job satisfaction? This book gives you the tools you need to develop a process to take control and turn the relationship with your boss around. Let's face it—people are a company's best asset. It's important that people believe they can be effective in their work system for the business to be successful.

Call to Action

A Tyrant manager is not your coach. A Tyrant manager is not your friend. A Tyrant manager, is just that—your boss. You can't change the person but you can change your approach. I realize you might have tried other methods to gain equal footing with your boss, and maybe you have heard of one method over another to use with any number of management "styles." For change to happen you will first have to re-set your expectations that your situation cannot change. Once you can outline your desired outcome, it's just a matter of building the right communication roadmap to get there.

If you're still thinking things will never change, I challenge you to work through your initial doubts. The situation with your boss is not

etched in stone. Rest assured that the information in this book will give you what you need to get back on track, feel balanced, and focus your thinking. You deserve to go to work in a civil work atmosphere, and I applaud your efforts to find a lasting solution. I believe you have the determination and the courage to get the outcomes you want. Now take a deep breath—it's time to face your Tyrant.

- Tony Deblauwe

Chapter 1

Emotions and Work

It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it.

—Lena Horne

We all belong to a unique work system. The purpose of this system is to transform a series of activities into products and services for customers. The work system sounds simple enough, however, it is dependent on one key ingredient—people. Without people, there is no system, no matter the resources, tools, strategies, or money available to fund it. In other words, there is no business.

A business cannot control the reasons why a person contributes to the work system. People work for different reasons. For some people it's the pay and benefits, others it's the challenge of the work, and still others thrive on the socialization with peers. For many it's a combination of all of these. Regardless of why, most people would agree that work becomes burdensome if tension or frustration surrounds them. If these conditions exist, the work system slows down and people become less productive. It only takes one major dysfunctional boss to foster an unproductive work system.

I experienced the hardship of a strained work system when I reported to a bad boss early in my career. He was a senior director who headed a large global business unit. At the time, I was new to Human Resources as well as a new employee. After I started, I scheduled an introductory meeting with him. I prepared for days—reviewed organization charts,

product summaries, financial summaries—you name it. I wanted to research everything so I could ask him the right questions and build my credibility. The day of the meeting, I went to his office, confident I would leave behind a good impression.

The moment I stepped into the office, he simply looked up at me then pointed to a chair. I didn't think much of it and sat down. Before I could open my mouth he said, "Look, I don't care much for HR folks. You guys are always coming up with some useless way to create something out of nothing and waste my time. I run things my own way, so if I want to fire someone, I will, and my team gets that about me. So I don't need some stupid management training workshop or other worthless touchy-feely stuff—I am a great manager already, ask anybody." He paused for a moment, and as I tried to collect myself and respond to his comments, the phone rang. He motioned to me that he needed to take the call and gestured the meeting was over by waving goodbye. Needless to say, I was amazed that it took less than five minutes for my new manager to make me feel worthless.

The rest of that day I obsessed over what happened. I wondered if I had chosen the wrong company—or worse—the wrong career! I brooded over that meeting and asked myself:

Had I done something wrong?

Why did he treat me like that when all I was trying to do was help?

Is he always like this?

Although I took what happened personally, I learned a lesson. I immediately understood how powerful negative behavior from one's boss can influence an individual, a team, or even an entire business, to success or failure. I also realized I was ill-equipped to handle a person who behaved in that fashion. It didn't make it any easier that I was in HR. I was supposed to know how to handle difficult people and not get upset. When it happens to you, however, it doesn't matter what job you hold—you can't help feeling marginalized.

When managers behave without regard or compassion for those they harm, it's no wonder people feel resentful. I did. Eventually I learned how to work with the guy, but it wasn't easy and I felt I always had to watch my back.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WORK?

Everyday I come across stories about workers who feel they are getting less and less fulfillment from their jobs. In fact, indications are that our feelings about work are becoming more negative and the relationship with our boss is a major contributing cause. Global Human Resources consulting firm Towers Perrin, in partnership with human motivations firm Gang & Gang, surveyed 1110 U.S. employees regarding their emotional connection to their jobs. Of the fifteen categories surveyed, issues with management ranked second only after workload.

A famous research study, conducted by the Gallup Organization, surveyed nearly one million U.S. respondents. The results were published in *First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently* by former Gallup consultants, Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. One of the key findings was that the relationship with the immediate supervisor was pivotal in productivity.

Another study that examined the attitudes and feelings of workers and bosses was conducted by website information portal *badbossology.com*. Their online survey found that of over a thousand participants, 48 percent would fire their boss if they could, 29 percent would have their boss assessed by a workplace psychologist, and 23 percent would send their boss to management training.

These surveys provide a glimpse into the reality that many people are dissatisfied with their boss. With all of this frustration and anxiety floating around, it's no wonder why employees' stress levels are higher, conflict is rampant and balanced communication is lacking.

EMOTIONS LINKED TO JOB IDENTITY

What these surveys show us is that of all the work relationships we form, the one between boss and employee is important on an emotional level. You can witness this at parties as people introduce themselves and ask, “What do you do?” This can be a tough question as your work identity can define to others a key aspect of who you are. When we tell strangers what we do for a living, we are expressing this emotional tie, either by enthusiastically describing our role or quickly skirting the question and changing the subject.

Connecting part of your identity to a satisfying job is challenging when you are faced with a boss who behaves poorly towards you. We perceive negative behavior from our superior as a threat; not only to how we work, but to how work makes us feel. Our feeling of self worth is difficult to discuss because emotion has no place in most corporate settings. When you are discussing the bottom line, facts, figures, and continued profitability, you are expected to be rational.

Further complicating the belief that emotions are taboo at work is that certain displays of emotion are considered “good” or “bad.” For example, if you are enthusiastic about a corporate mission statement (that may have little connection to strategy), you are displaying a “good” emotion. If, however, you stand up and passionately, yet professionally, poke holes in the strategy you risk displaying “bad” emotions and could be perceived as negative. It’s simply a matter of two different points of view; but because your reaction is against the majority, it is considered “bad.” This confusion of passion versus negativity with employees is common and usually forms the hook which managers need to pursue a formal performance review. The perception is there is no convenient way for most people to effectively handle negative feelings borne out of work situations without risking being labeled an outcast, troublemaker, or worse—not a team player.

Given this backdrop, it’s no wonder why most of us struggle with expressing negative feelings towards our boss, even when our boss is a Tyrant. Your feelings toward your boss may be justified, but expressing them may be considered a “bad” emotion because the business

norm is to keep criticism of team members, especially managers, to a minimum. You simply have to bottle up your emotions and deal with the problem. This unresolved emotional state is left to fester and that's where we begin to doubt ourselves and learn to dislike our job. You sit and stew, silently hoping, if not expecting, that someone will come along, see your manager for what he or she is, and do something about it. Meantime, in the real world, you walk around with a sort of mask—smiling as though everything is fine on the outside—but a wreck on the inside.

Left alone, these negative feelings build up, dysfunction with the relationship grows, and eventually your behavior and performance is affected. This lack of emotional release can impact more than just your attitude toward work—it can take a personal toll as well.

Case Study: Implode and withdraw

This story revolves around a middle manager I worked with. I'll call her "Sylvia." This example shows what happened to one individual when suppressed emotions affected more than work life.

Sylvia worked in a busy global logistics role. She came to me with problems she was having with her boss. Between vendors, internal customers and the usual deadlines, she grew tired of her boss's constant micro-management, reporting schedule, and general lack of concern for her well-being. When she finally got the courage to vent about it, she was immersed in negative feelings. She was so incensed by her boss's inept behavior, lack of gratitude, and meanness that she took personal time off following particularly hard days. She stewed over how poorly he treated her and the amount of stress the relationship caused her.

She forced the frustration inward because she had worked for the company for over five years and was gearing for a promotion that was very important to her. She wanted to make sure her boss saw her as a team player. The demands on her were so great emotionally and physically that she simply faked enthusiasm in front of her boss and her peers.

She often avoided him and tried not to bother him with work details. The problems followed her home, where she found herself growing more irritable toward her family. She needed her job and enjoyed the challenges it provided, but she felt that one wrong word or statement would be her undoing, so she bottled up her feelings. She was on edge and felt no one cared about or understood her problems.

When Sylvia got the news she would not be considered for the promotion, she was devastated. She came to me in tears and stated how unfair the decision was and that her boss passed her over out of spite and because she was a woman. After she let out months of emotional distress in my office, we were able to agree to an alternative course of action. A few weeks later she transferred to another department under a new manager and within six months she was promoted with higher pay than the promotion she agonized over that would have kept her with her old boss.

Sylvia had a positive turn of events, but as Sylvia's case points out, we can react to emotional stress in different ways. Sylvia's choice was to internalize and withdraw because she liked her job and thought any other kind of behavior might kill her chances of promotion. She struggled with her mask of professionalism without recognizing and channeling her true feelings properly. The negative emotions had to go somewhere so they were exhibited toward her co-workers and family. In the end she was better off, but she got lucky. Sylvia did not change anything. She felt unable to develop an approach that may have changed how she worked with her previous boss.

As mentioned earlier, your work has a connection to your identity whether you realize it or not, but this is merely one piece of how you form your emotional make-up. Your emotional response is fueled by several different facets, including things like personality, values, upbringing, and cultural heritage. You may have seen the illustration of an iceberg where the top is just above the water and the massive ice body lies beneath the surface. We are like that—what you see on the surface is simply the “tip of the iceberg,” and the real substance lies beneath.

Most of us feel we act with a sense of right and wrong. Our tolerance of these principles on the job is sensitive and if someone behaves in a way that we feel is unjust, it's hard not to feel assaulted. The feeling is most intense when the behavior is directly in your face. However, it can be worse when done indirectly, because once you discover you were taken advantage of, misled, or lied to, the violation seems stronger. Bottom line, as long as you interpret the behavior as wronging you, the negative emotional reaction kicks in.

Your goal in dealing with the emotions you have toward your Tyrant boss and how to separate those feelings from who you are and the work you do, begins with an understanding of your emotional triggers. Working for a Tyrant can feel as if your life energy is being sucked dry because of one behavioral slight after another. Finally you find only a few options: lash out, tune out, or get out. Such feelings form a prison that impacts your thinking and actions. In the exercise that follows, you will explore your emotional outlook about work.

Exercise #1: Feelings at work snapshot

To separate how your feelings and thoughts impact your work identity and work system, you first have to analyze your current emotional state before you can think about ways to improve it.

Read the two columns below and decide which words describe your feelings about your current work environment.

Angry and Ticked Off?	or	Happy and Carefree?
Depressed and Withdrawn?	or	Energized and Involved?
Passive?	or	Active?
Ignored?	or	Valued?

If you connect more with the descriptions on the right side, you probably don't work for a Tyrant. If the left column describes your feelings better, then you are making a good first step in acknowledging your current emotional state. Refer to this exercise as you read further in the book so you can continue to assess your progress and note all changes in your ability to diffuse emotional triggers.



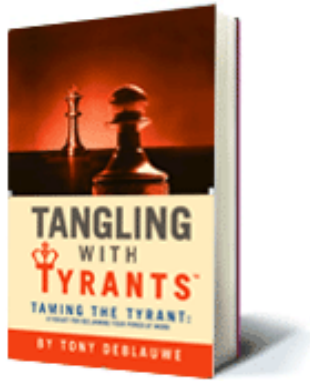
About the Author

Tony Deblauwe is the founder of HR4Change and has an extensive background working with individuals and corporations in the areas of organizational design, human resources management, leadership, and development. A certified coach, he received his Masters degree in Organizational Development and Human Resources from the University of San Francisco, and he has written articles for several trade publications including the Northern California Human Resources Association and *CareerSource* magazine. Tony lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and can be contacted at **info@hr4change.com**.

Get links to more information or share your comments about workplace issues at:

www.hr4change.com

Further enhance your Tyrant-busting techniques with:



**Tangling with Tyrants®: Taming the Tyrant:
A Toolkit for Reclaiming your Power at Work**

By Tony Deblauwe

About the Workbook

In the second installment of the series, Tangling with Tyrants®: Taming the Tyrant uses personal development exercises and ratings of management behaviors to provide readers the tools they need to instantly build a results-oriented communication action plan with their boss. Readers will explore various aspects of their own style as well as analyze their boss across eight critical behaviors every manager must have. The workbook is hands-on and engaging in order to outline a solid strategy and long-term solution for dealing with any difficult boss.

Available at www.amazon.com or at www.hr4change.com