

A stressed-out boss is a bad boss, research concludes

December 14 2017



Credit: Nik Shuliahin, CC0

It's tough to be the boss. You can't make everyone happy all the time, and the job can be defined by stress.

However, the [stress](#) that a leader experiences can also have serious effects on an organization's overall [work culture](#). Many people become less effective under stress, and bosses and organizational leaders are no exception.

Dr. Peter Harms, an assistant professor of management in the Culverhouse College of Commerce at The University of Alabama, examined the body of research into the relationship between leadership and stress. The conclusions show that a stressed-out [boss](#) can be a bad boss.

The results, published in the *Leadership Quarterly* earlier this year, integrated research findings on [leadership](#), stress and burnout from over 150 studies across 25 different countries.

The research showed that toxic bosses have significant negative impacts on the morale and performance of their employees. In addition, when faced with more stress, the bosses lashed out at subordinates and behaved in a toxic manner.

The study suggests organizations should encourage both managers and subordinates to take part in stress prevention and reduction programs and for managers to recognize their role in creating stress for others.

If someone is in a workplace with pervasive and detrimental amounts of stress, there are steps to take. Harms said employees could combat the issue head-on.

"If you have an abusive or toxic boss, you should contact HR," he said. "Most companies want to do the right thing and will want to avoid legal [problems](#), but they might just be unaware of the problem unless you bring it up."

Managers trying to be a good boss can take quite a bit away from the research, Harms said.

"There's no magic needed to be an effective leader. Just treat people with respect, and let them know what they have to do," he said. "It isn't

hard. The key is to avoid being the problem."

More information: P.D. Harms et al. Leadership and stress: A meta-analytic review, *The Leadership Quarterly* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.10.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.10.006)

Provided by University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa

Citation: A stressed-out boss is a bad boss, research concludes (2017, December 14) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-12-stressed-out-boss-bad.html>

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