

## How to ... deal with an indecisive boss

### 1 Warmer

- a. Quickly think about the best and worst boss you've ever had and then complete these two sentences.
- A good boss ...
  - A bad boss ...
- b. Compare your completed sentences.

### 2 Key words

Match the key words to the definitions below. Find and underline them in the article, and then read the article and note how they are used in context.

bolstered	concise	decisiveness	enabler	go after	micromanager
paper trail	pertinent	repercussions	step up	vacillate	wishy-washy

1. the ability to make choices or decide what to do quickly and confidently  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. not strong or definite \_\_\_\_\_
3. someone who wants to control every part of a business or system in a way that is not necessary or useful \_\_\_\_\_
4. take responsibility for doing something, even though it might be difficult \_\_\_\_\_
5. actively try to get something \_\_\_\_\_
6. bad effects that something has, usually lasting for a long time \_\_\_\_\_
7. a person that makes it possible for someone else to achieve something  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. keep changing your ideas about something \_\_\_\_\_
9. supported and made stronger \_\_\_\_\_
10. straightforward and easy to understand \_\_\_\_\_
11. relevant \_\_\_\_\_
12. a series of documents that can be used to show what someone did or how a situation developed  
\_\_\_\_\_



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**Bosses have to be able to make decisions. How should you act and what can you do if your boss is indecisive? DEBORAH CAPRAS has some tips.**

**1** A key skill in a good boss is decisiveness. A boss who is constantly changing their mind – or is too wishy-washy to make a decision is an ineffective leader. What can you do if you feel your boss is clearly avoiding their decision-making responsibility? We look at what the experts advise.

#### Is it really indecision?

**2** Have you considered that your boss may not be a micromanager? Sydney Finkelstein, author of *Superbosses: How Exceptional Leaders Master the Flow of Talent*, says it may be possible that your boss isn't telling you what to do because they expect you to "step up" and "confidently go after responsibility". Instead of waiting for a decision, try presenting a well-documented one to your boss.

#### Understand their view

**3** Perhaps your boss has another perfectly good reason for not making a decision. As Jory MacKay writes on [Blog.RescueTime.com](http://Blog.RescueTime.com), you may not understand the whole context. "They have a longer view of the company," he writes, "and what seems like an easy decision for you might have further-reaching repercussions." Can you find out what the reasons or repercussions might be?

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#### Provide support

**4** What if your boss just can't make up their mind? In their book *Working with Difficult People*, Amy Cooper Hakim and Muriel Solomon suggest that you will then need to earn their trust and become an enabler of their decisions. "Bosses who vacillate can be bolstered by receiving clear, concise, pertinent information," they argue. The key is to provide "whatever data is needed to make good, solid, final decisions."

#### Lower the stress

**5** It's stressful having an indecisive boss. But what if your boss is also feeling stressed out? In this case, you need to lower the stress for both of you. On [TheJobNetwork.com](http://TheJobNetwork.com), Eric Titner advises against a confrontation when you need a decision, as that only increases the stress factor. Instead, always adopt "a calm and patient manner," he says. Titner also suggests that you keep a paper trail of all decisions. Use email! That way, you can show the effects of your boss's indecision on your productivity. This can help minimize its effects on your career. And, as an added bonus, a paper trail might help reduce your own feelings of stress.



**6** DEBORAH CAPRAS is a freelance author, trainer and corporate communications specialist.

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### 3 Understanding the article

a. Find eight pieces of advice in the article and write them into the box or say them aloud.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

b. Which piece of advice would be the easiest to follow in your work situation? Which would be the most difficult?

### 4 Discussion

Answer the questions and talk about how, in each situation, your boss's attitude affected your level of motivation and overall work performance.

Have you ever had a boss who ...

- ... you considered to be wishy-washy?
- ... was indecisive or constantly changing their mind?
- ... expected you to go after responsibility (instead of waiting for it to be given to you)?
- ... was calm and patient most of the time?

## How to ... deal with an indecisive boss

### 5 Good advice

Read the following language for giving and receiving advice.

Giving advice	Taking or accepting advice
Have you thought about ...?	Actually, that might just work!
I think you'd better ...	Hmm, I'm not sure if that'll work, but I'm willing to give it a go.
If I were you, I'd ...	OK, I'll try that and see what happens.
Maybe you should ...	Thank you. I hope that'll work.
Perhaps you ought to ...	Thanks. I appreciate your advice.
Why don't you ...?	Thanks. I'll give that a try.
Why not ...?	That's a good idea. I hadn't thought of that.
You could always ...	

1. **Work in pairs. Student A, choose one of the below scenarios. Explain it to your partner, invent and add further details and ask for advice.**
2. **Student B, give advice.**
3. **Student A, accept your partner's advice.**
4. **Swap roles and continue with the other scenarios.**

**Note: Use language from the box and advice from the article wherever possible.**

You really want to work from home for a while. You have good reasons. Your boss is not sure whether to allow this or not as no one else in your department has been allowed to work from home before now.

Your boss is taking a long time to make a decision about your holiday request. You need a quick answer so that you and your partner can get the same two weeks off work. Your partner has to put in their holiday request by the end of this week.

You'd like to attend the trade fair next month but, in order to do so, your boss needs to give their written agreement. So far, they have been unable to decide whether to give their permission or not as they might need you in the office.

You desperately need someone to help you complete your project by the deadline. You've been working overtime every day this week and still cannot manage it alone. Your boss has indicated that they don't feel it necessary to talk to you about this.

You've been helping a difficult and demanding trainee every day for the past few weeks. You feel it's time someone else started helping them so that you can get on with your own work. Your boss can't decide who the trainee should go to.