

# BusinessWeek

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## Issue: A Boorish Boss Makes Work Unbearable

The bad behavior started even before the job started and only got worse. Could anything have been done to change the situation?

I should have known what kind of boss Jackie Pebble would be from the first moment I had contact with him, and maybe I already did. But the rent was due, my COBRA insurance had run out, and I was sick of interviewing. I needed a job—fast.

When I arrived at the appointed time for my first interview, for a senior editor job at a trade magazine for dermatologists, he kept me waiting in the lobby of the company's Manhattan office for 15 minutes. Then the receptionist handed me her phone receiver and said, "Mr. Pebble would like to speak with you."

"I can't see you today," he announced. "I'm too busy."

### CALLING HR TO COMPLAIN

His rudeness left me momentarily speechless. Finally I managed to say, "I came all the way from Connecticut for this interview, so I'd really appreciate it if we could have it today."

"All right," he said. "But you're going to have to wait."

Wait I did, for about 45 minutes. He finally showed up, ushered me in, and gruffly quizzed me about my journalistic background for about 10 minutes, and the interview was over. When I got home that afternoon, I still felt annoyed about the discourteous treatment Jackie had doled out earlier in the day. So annoyed, in fact, that I called HR to complain. What did I have to lose? There was no chance I would get this job, I figured, and I didn't want it anyway.

### THE WORST BOSS I'VE EVER HAD

Gayle, the HR person I spoke with, was very nice. "I'm sorry to hear you had a bad experience," she said. "But on the bright side, Jackie was just up here asking if we could raise the salary for the job to meet your requirements."

I was speechless again. Maybe he is a good guy, I thought, and I'd just happened to catch him in a rare disagreeable mood. And money talks, after all. "Well, that does make me feel a little better," I said. I ended up accepting the job and starting work the following Monday.

By Friday, Jackie had established himself as the worst boss I'd ever had—a distinction he still holds. He would give me a project and bark a few directions, never explaining them thoroughly or giving me the info I needed. The first day, he threw a bunch of photos at me that needed to be returned to whoever sent them. But all they had was the person's name—no address, no phone number. This was back in pre-Internet days, long before you could simply type "David Stein" and "dermatologist" in Google and come up with some clues.

### THE PATH OF MINIMAL INVOLVEMENT

"How am supposed I to find the addresses?" I asked.

"I want minimal involvement in this," he said.

I came to realize that was his mantra. A couple of days later, he asked me to write an article about the results of a dermatology practice management study. He told me the word count he expected, and said, "I want minimal

