

Survival/Safety Tips for Working with a Narcissistic Boss/Coworker

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1. Set Realistic Expectations

It is an understatement to say that working for and/or with a Narcissist requires a lot of effort, energy, creativity and awareness. They are skilled at the art of deception and manipulation. When engaging with a Narcissistic boss/co-worker in conversation, be consistent and objective in your approach, while accepting their limitations. Thinking you can fix this style of relating will be a disadvantageous approach; and you will quickly learn the lengths the Narcissistic boss/colleague will go to hold their image in high esteem.

Having realistic expectations will prove beneficial in moving the relationship forward. As well, it can be beneficial to enlist the support of a coach, a safe friend, or possibly a trusted work colleague while you are trying to wrap your head (and heart) around your current work situation.

2. Be Confident of Your Worth & Abilities

Knowing who you are- your worth and value, as well as where your strengths and talents lie, will help you to remain grounded and separated in your approach when interacting with the Narcissist, no matter what he/she may say to you and/or about you to others.

Understand what your hot issues are and what could cause you to respond in problematic ways while relating with your Narcissistic boss/co-worker. Since frustrations can run high, knowing these areas will help you be more in tune with and gauge when you might be near to engaging in less than desirable or inappropriate behavior which you may end up regretting, at the very least. Since causing you to become 'undone' emotionally actually 'feeds' the Narcissist's fragile ego, the likelihood is high for the Narcissist to use your emotional outburst against you at a later date, for his/her benefit.

Refrain from justifying your actions or trying to prove your value and worth to the Narcissist. The Narcissist is not interested in this display from you. In fact, this could cause the Narcissist to resort to using additional intimidation/devaluing tactics with you. Hold onto your personal goals and ambitions as it relates to your position, the work you do and for the company you work. This will help to prevent you being sucked into the Narcissist's 'rabbit hole' of confusion, while the Narcissist self-adulates.

"When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you." ~African Proverb



3. Protect the Image of the Narcissistic Boss/Colleague

Since the Narcissist's ego is fragile, giving feedback in ways that don't shame or make him/her look/feel bad, will go far. If the Narcissist feels shamed, via direct confrontation or by you responding in a defensive manner, he/she will likely resort to retaliation in order to restore their image.

Some behaviors that the Narcissist will receive well, include giving an occasional compliment, sharing an interesting tidbit, thanking him/her for some positive contribution, and asking his/her advice on something.

“Managing up is not Kissing up.” ~Caliber Leadership

4. Accept It's All About the Narcissistic Boss/Colleague

To the Narcissistic boss/colleague, all things must revolve around him/her. The idea must be his. The win must be hers. If there is a mistake or an unfortunate outcome, he/she won't claim responsibility. In fact, he/she will find someone to blame- the scapegoat. Holding these understandings will help you to practice patience and self-control when interacting with this type of relating style. Don't try to be a different person than you are, but always attempt to do what is right for the business.

5. Set Boundaries

Be clear about your needs in a way that meets your needs, while promoting the boss's agenda. If you can tie in your boundary with making you a better employee for the Narcissist's cause or agenda, you will get much further than trying to appeal to his/her compassion for you.

It is worth mentioning here that the Narcissistic boss/colleague is greatly challenged to show empathy. Walking in someone else's shoes is not something the Narcissist considers or is remotely able to do. In fact, for them, walking in another's shoes equates to giving up his/her own ideas, feelings, opinions, position and thoughts. Demonstrations of compassion and collaboration rank low. Though the Narcissistic boss/co-worker doesn't value compassion in others, they are entitled to being shown it by others.



Remember you are capable of what the Narcissistic boss/colleague is not. Challenging your assumptions, 'shoulds' and shouldn'ts will assist you in focusing on the goal of influencing (not fixing) your Narcissistic boss/co-worker.

Consider:

Ahead of time the terms of the interaction you will have with your Narcissistic boss/colleague

How you will have interactions without confronting the Narcissistic boss/colleague
Reinforce positive behaviors, avoid criticism and discourage negative behaviors with the Narcissistic boss/colleague.

Offer agreement with acceptable parts of the Narcissist's statements, while at the same time adding in something like this:

"I wonder if....

"How about

"This could be a benefit to you...

Change the position of your body or the stance of your hands/arms (stand up, change location in the room, change placement of hands in space, etc.) if the Narcissistic boss/colleague resorts to negative relating. The goal here is to keep the conversation moving along.

Set time limits for meetings with the Narcissistic boss/co-worker by having another activity you need to get to directly after the meeting. Also, you may find that you spare yourself some frustration if you create a buffer of added time in your schedule, should the boss/colleague need more time in the meeting. The Narcissist is eager for your attention and will have the tendency of taking more and more of your time and energy; yet, don't feel obligated to listen indefinitely. Try using your body to communicate with the Narcissistic boss/co-worker, i.e. stand up when the meeting is coming to an end to politely demonstrate the holding of your meeting time agreement and boundary.



6. Empathize & Communicate with Family and Friends

You will likely find working with a Narcissistic boss/colleague creates time, energy, and emotional drains on your life. As such, family members and friends may begin to feel they are not as important to you as they once were and that they are getting your dregs. This can be difficult for both you and your family/friends. By acknowledging to them that you know they're getting a raw deal, this will go far in helping to maintain these valuable relationships, while helping communicate that you are tapped into what is going on.

7. Be Educated in and Put in Place Counterbalance Measures for Burnout

Understanding what Burnout is and what it looks/feels like will help you to put into place strategies to safeguard against burnout when working with a Narcissistic boss/co-worker. Being able to gauge if you are heading in the direction of burnout will also be helpful in preserving your health. Having your livelihood challenged by the effects of working with a Narcissistic boss/co-worker is not a road you should ever have to traverse.

8. Change Jobs

If you can't get a different job or aren't ready to make a change, be sure to develop your career so you feel less trapped. Develop contacts outside of your current company and create new options to move on when you are ready. For example, you may choose to return to school for additional training/education. Or, you may find going on interviews (even if you're not ready to make a job change yet) will give you a sense of accomplishment, and, that there really are other options available.

9. Get a Coach

A coach can support you in gaining perspective and by bringing reality into focus, while helping you to create and set clear and healthy boundaries. Your work with a coach may not change the circumstances of your situation, but it will help to decrease your job-related stress, as you create a plan of action and become more empowered to move in dignity and respect with yourself and others.

Action Item:

Are you fed up with living life small? Are you done with living on others' terms? If you are curious how coaching can support you to live your most Vibrant life, during the month of October, Paige is offering free 20-minute discovery calls.

Contact Paige at: paige@paigeharriscoaching.com.