

The popularity of my article, [When The Boss Doesn't Get It¹](#), leads me to address a related challenge ...



The scenario: Your boss is all about his own reputation. In fact, sometimes he tells you to do things that will help him look good, even when the company or your clients will suffer for it. You're between the old proverbial rock-and-a-hard-place.

Do you just say, "he's the boss" and go along with him? Confront him? Rat him out to higher management? Ignore him and do what you think best?

Lots of variables make a formulaic answer to this elusive. But let's at least explore the issues a little.

These tough calls are where knowing your own values is critical. Regardless of your choice, you will likely pay some price for your decision. Knowing what's really important to you will help you stand firm and accept the consequences of your actions. There are practical costs to principle-based decisions, but you'll feel better about yourself when you accept the cost for principles you believe in.

Let's recall a few leadership principles:

- You can be a leader in any situation regardless of your role or title.
- Leadership is influencing others for their success. It is fundamentally other-centric, meaning leaders put the success of others ahead of their own.
- One attribute of character-based leadership is the willingness to accept short-term pain for long-term good. That pain includes tough conversations.

Now let's consider a few applications to the situation you're in:

- Usually this problem has roots in the hiring/promotion/cultural practices of the organization. They probably aren't paying enough attention to the character of those they put in leadership. That doesn't excuse any choices you make (you probably didn't assess the culture you hired into very well either). But you don't own the consequences to your boss or your company of their choices; but you do own your own motives, actions, and attitudes. If your choices cost you your job, that probably beats spending your career in a toxic culture.
- Your goal is the success of the organization and the success of your boss. That doesn't mean helping your boss succeed in dishonorable behaviors. But you do have to weigh the ultimate impact of your decisions on both parties. There may be no perfect solution but seek to understand how each option impacts their success.
- Don't judge too quickly. Consider the possibility that your boss knows things you don't that would change your view.
- Your attitude matters at least as much as your actions. If you choose to go over your boss's head, are you going as a complainer or seeking to help him succeed? If you confront your boss, seek first to understand. Ask questions that will make him think. Perhaps a well-crafted analogy would shed light. If you grudgingly go along with him, will your attitude become a cancer to the organization, or can you stay healthy?

Lean into your principles and you'll grow through these tough times.

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¹ <https://www.enlumenls.com/when-the-boss-doesnt-get-it/>