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# Don't like Mondays?

## Here's how to deal with workplace manipulation

By Dr Mary Casey

Do you suffer from Mondayitis because of a difficult manager or colleague? Do they turn your days into a series of battles, make you feel helpless or powerless, or drain you of energy? You could very likely be the target of a manipulator.

Manipulation can be either aggressive or passive aggressive. Openly aggressive behaviour such as bullying is easy to identify, but covert attacks are very difficult to spot. As a guideline, you know you're being manipulated when the problem is ongoing, and you are left feeling unsure of where you stand, anxious, stressed or even physically sick.

How you respond to manipulative behaviour will determine whether or not you become a target. Manipulation is prevalent in workplaces, because their top-down structures are the perfect breeding ground for control and power tactics.

Manipulators aim to covertly or overtly control and overpower the behaviours of others, even if it robs another person of their freedom of choice, reason and rationality. They may abuse their positions or responsibilities, and overstep accepted boundaries in the workplace.

I researched manipulation for four years after becoming the target of a manipulative senior employee. I learned why I was a perfect target and what I needed to change in order to not

be a victim — I lacked personal boundaries.

### Offensive tactics used by manipulators

- **Threats:** Using concealed or open threats to keep their targets anxious.
- **Asking 'harmless' questions:** Gathering information to use against you.
- **Refutation:** Denying they have done wrong.
- **Discrediting:** Taking credit for things you've done, while discrediting you in return.
- **Distraction:** Changing the subject to evade the issue or gain time.
- **Accusations or discrediting:** Shifting the blame to others and detract in subtle, hard-to-detect ways.
- **Deception:** Withholding large amounts of the truth, distorting the truth, or being vague.

### How to deal with a manipulative boss

When the manipulator is someone you report to, there are only two solutions:

- **Disengage emotionally:** Set boundaries and use assertiveness. You can expect your salary and other benefits of the job, but you must relinquish your need for positive feedback or recognition.
- **Disengage physically:** If you are emotionally unable to do the above, or if the situation becomes unbearable, you'll need to consider leaving your job. Your health and your family will thank you for it!



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### How to deal with a manipulative co-worker

When the manipulator is someone you don't report to, use the following strategies:

- **Disengage emotionally:** Stop seeking approval or feedback from them.
- **Set boundaries:** Let them know what you will and won't accept.
- **Think rationally:** Find out what they want from you, and stop giving it to them.
- **Observe only outcomes:** Don't try to second-guess the meaning behind their words or actions.
- **Be clear and specific:** Ensure your body language backs your words.
- **Stand your ground:** When they put pressure on you, repeat the same statement each time.
- **Keep them responsible:** Don't let them get away with shifting the blame.
- **Act fast:** They interpret your silence as agreement if you wait for the "right time" to address the issue.
- **Accept no excuse for inappropriate behaviour:** Re-focus on the issue you are trying to confront.



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