



press clip

CRANKY COLLEAGUE ISSUE



Control freaks

If power plays plague your office, don't despair, resolutions can be reached, writes **Mary Casey**.

Is that manipulative boss or work colleague turning your days into a series of battles before your summer holiday glow has even faded? Do you think that resolving the issue is near impossible?

Manipulative behaviour is rife in workplaces. If you are on the receiving end, behavioural strategies based on assertiveness and setting boundaries can ensure you are never a target.

Manipulation includes bullying but, because it can be either aggressive or passive-aggressive, it is a much wider problem and more difficult to identify than bullying. It is prevalent in workplaces where top-down structures are the perfect breeding ground for control and power tactics.

Manipulation is about control. Manipulators aim to covertly or overtly control and overpower the behaviour of others. They use subversive power tactics to get something for themselves, even if it robs another person of their freedom of choice, reason and rationality.

Control gestures can include taking the credit for actions while discrediting others, shifting the blame, communicating dishonestly yet persuasively, diverting the subject to a minor issue when confronted, using concealed threats or put-downs, lying or distorting the facts, twisting anything you may have said to them in the past and offering excuses for or downplaying the effects of their own behaviour.

When the manipulator is someone you have to work with daily – or, worse, report to – these

behaviours can make you feel helpless, powerless, drained, frustrated and even physically sick.

How can you resolve it? People manipulate because they can, so firstly it's important to always define your limits and set boundaries by being assertive. Seeing your strong boundaries, a manipulator will find you a difficult target and will likely move on to easier prey.

When confronting them, avoid sarcasm, hostility, threats and put-downs. Manipulators are masters at emotional tactics and will use any emotional reaction on your part as evidence that you are the problem, not them.

It's very important that you always focus on the behaviour, not the person: refocus on the issue at hand, keep the responsibility where it belongs and deal with the behaviour immediately. This will ensure you disengage emotionally and think rationally.

Unemotional assertiveness is an attitude that a manipulator will be at a loss to deal with.

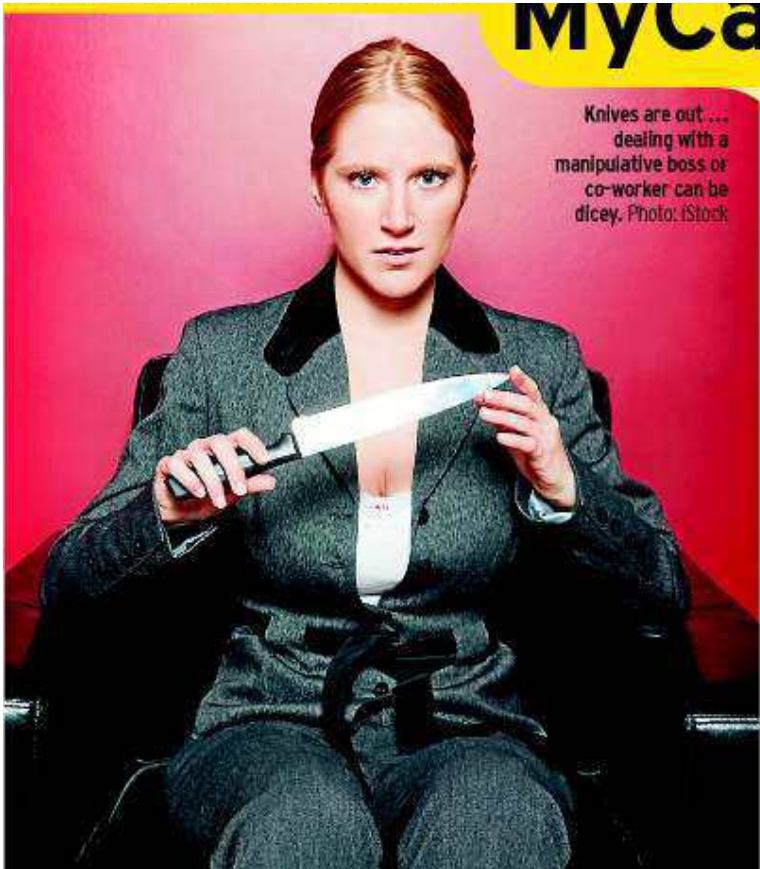
Dealing with a manager or boss

The only way to protect yourself and regain control is to disengage.

- Disengage emotionally. This is where you set your boundaries and use assertive behaviour. You sacrifice their positive feedback or recognition but you can continue to expect your salary and other benefits of the job.

- Disengage physically. If you cannot find a happy medium by disengaging emotionally, the next step is to leave. Your health – and

press clip



likely your partner, who has seen the effects – will thank you for it.

Dealing with a co-worker

- Disengage emotionally. Stop seeking approval or feedback.
- 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 outcomes only. 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 pressure you, repeat the statement each time until they understand you will not change your mind.
- Keep them responsible. Don't accept it when they shift the blame.
- Act fast. They interpret your silence as agreement if you wait for the "right time" to act.
- Accept no excuse for inappropriate behaviour. Focus on the issue you are trying to confront.

Favourite manipulator tactics

- Making threats: concealed or open, 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.
- Distraction: changing the subject to evade the issue or gain time.
- Accusations or discrediting: shifting the blame to others and detracting in subtle ways.
- Deception: withholding the truth, distorting the truth, or acting vague



Dr Mary Casey is founder and chief executive of Casey Centre, caseycentre.com.au. Her DVD and workbook help identify manipulators, present strategies to deal with them effectively and ensure you aren't a target. See dealwithmanipulators.com.

MyCareer
.com.au

Are you being manipulated? Tell us at mycareer.com.au/vote.