

WHY I'M A**ROTTEN
BOSS**

My first job was on a magazine, working for a lady who wore stockings with seams, dresses with matching jackets, hats with little veils on them, and sensible shoes. To anybody who has ever seen me in my lucky sneakers, it would be obvious that this woman and I had little in common. The reason she hired me in the first place eludes me to this day. However, I do know why I wanted the job, even for the meager \$75.00 a week it offered. I was more than willing to sacrifice perhaps \$25.00 per for the chance to be called "editorial assistant" and not secretary, a designation which at the time conjured up for me the movie-inspired image of someone with a Brooklyn accent chatting on the phone while alternately filing her nails and eating a cruller. (Since I was indeed from Brooklyn—and since I was even more indeed a snob—I was particularly sensitive to this image.)

For \$75.00 a week I was in the category of "brite beginner with chance for advancement" (or, more accurately, "brt. bgnr. w chnc for advncmnt."), side-stepping secretary as neatly as Gene Kelly side-steps rain puddles. Or yes, I still had an inside office through which anyone wanting to see my boss had to pass, and I did have to make reservations for banquet luncheons at the Cafe Richelieu which I could not myself attend, and I did have to Xerox manuscripts by, and be pleasant to, authors whose work I thought was dreck, but on the other hand I could sign letters "assistant editor," I could read through the unsolicited manuscript pile in a (usually vain) search for genius, I could write blurbs and captions for story layouts, and I could

**IT'S SIMPLE—
POWER MAKES
ME NERVOUS****by bette-jane raphael**

The ability to command easily and with grace was not inbred in us ladies who grew up in sheath skirts. We have got to acquire it, like a taste for anchovies, and so far I haven't gotten the knack.

(and did) meet a young author who would take my virginity and break my heart.

And so we put up with each other, this lady and I, even though I felt my talents were tragically underutilized and she felt, I'm sure, that I could stand to be more of a secretary and less of a "brite beginner." She was not unkind to me, just unsympathetic.

My second boss, who did not choose me but inherited me from my first boss when she took over the former's job, was one of those blessings God sometimes grants to us in this world whether we deserve them or not. She got me raises, she let me read manuscripts that mattered, and she made sure everyone knew if I had written a blurb or a brilliant piece for editorial analysis, if I had found some material for the magazine, or, for that matter, if I had lost five pounds. She was kind and generous to me, and while I still hated typing letters, I no longer felt degraded by the act of putting finger to key, nor by the fact that I had to answer the phone with "Miss So-and-so's office" instead of "hello." She was unfailingly good-tempered with me even though my feeling that being a secretary was beneath me made me, naturally enough, mediocre at the job. To (continued on page 154)



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ROTTEN BOSS

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I'm still as rotten a boss as I ever was, which causes me some pain to admit.

this day I would willingly Xerox the Bible for her.

From these two women I learned many things about being a secretary and about being a woman with a secretary, but most of it flew out the window when the time came for me to hire one for myself. When that day arrived I suddenly came face to face with the only authority in the world I had never recognized—my own. It was not a confrontation I relished. Power, my own power, made me uncomfortable.

I side-stepped the issue entirely by deciding to hire a potential friend instead of an efficient secretary. The women's movement gave this decision validity, since a raised consciousness dictated that I find a young woman I could work "with," rather than someone who would work *for* me. So I went and hired a younger version of myself, someone who hated answering phones and Xeroxing manuscripts and typing letters, someone who had an opinion on everything, from the stories I commissioned for the magazine to the grammar I used in my correspondence, someone who was bright and, ultimately, a pain in the ass.

It wasn't her fault; it was mine. I simply couldn't handle the worry of both my own and her job satisfaction plus her opinion of me. Does a man worry about whether or not his secretary thinks he's a crumb? Somehow I don't think so, at least the one man I worked for didn't seem to care much. He sent me for coffee daily, had me buy his Christmas presents, help decorate his office and send away for size 20½ dresses for his mother. I also did his banking, paid his bills, argued on his behalf with the people at the Diners Club, and helped arrange his dinner parties. But since the job itself was so bilious, I didn't mind doing those things. I mean I *like* shopping, and I *don't* like typing, so when it came to a choice between going over to Saks on an extended lunch hour to buy his friend a present, or answering the phones, you can bet I wouldn't be at the old receiver. I never felt I was being abused, and I wonder if it had something to do with my belief that he was, after all, a man, a helpless bachelor who really needed me to keep his scattered life together. There was a certain amount of satisfaction in this. "His Gal Friday" and all that.

But, I vowed, no young woman would ever have to do that for me. I'd buy my own coffee, thank you very much. Unfortunately, I never remembered to buy coffee in the morning. My secretary, however, always bought herself some when the coffee wagon came around every morning, and she naturally asked me if I wanted any, and I said yes. And pretty soon I was looking forward to that cup of coffee, and when she started bringing in her own from the outside and not buying it either for herself or for me when the wagon came around, I was annoyed.

I was annoyed at a lot of things. At her grammatical suggestions, at the fact that she was often not back from lunch until after I was, at the fact that she forgot to make lunch reservations for me but remembered to put notes on manuscripts with her own unasked-for comments. Being annoyed, I was sometimes petty, testy, mean. And then I would feel terrible and guilty and give her the afternoon off, even though I might need her desperately. After which I would still feel terrible, but not guilty. And not feeling guilty is worth any price.

There was the thing about answering the phones. Should she have to say "Miss Raphael's office?" How about simply "Editorial Department?" How about "Hello?" This may sound like a small decision to you, but for me it ranked on a par with whether or not we should sell wheat to the Russians. We finally compromised on her giving, as salutation, the name of the publication where we were employed, which was not, thank heavens, *Screw*. But neither of us was really happy. I felt my image as a rising young executive was not being communicated forcefully enough to all the important people who called me, like my dermatologist's nurse and my cleaners' delivery boy. And she, I'm certain, felt demeaned by not being able to answer the phone like a normal human person.

I wish I could say that one day this young woman and I had a wonderfully cleansing heart-to-heart which resolved all our differences and enabled us to work in complete harmony from then on. Unfortunately the fact is that we never really resolved our problems, and when I eventually moved to another position in the company, we opted to part, she to stay and work for the woman who was replacing me in my old position. They, it turned out, got along fine, which confirmed my growing belief that the problem was mine, not hers. (I'm very good at this kind of thinking, by the way. If a man exposes himself to me in the subway, I also secretly believe it's more my problem than his. I give everybody the benefit of the doubt.) I was also beginning to suspect that I would never have one of those legendary loyal aides one hears about, those secretaries who follow their bosses from position to position like camp followers dogging the footsteps of mercenaries.

My second secretary, who was sweet and efficient, who loved being a secretary and who generally made my worklife a pleasure, was hired practically over my dead body by the man with whom I was to share her services. Having managed to learn absolutely nothing from experience, I was still looking for friendship rather than skill. "She's not hip enough," I had argued. "She doesn't care one way or the other about the ERA. She likes to ski! In Colorado, for chris-sakes." "Trust me," the man said, and I did.

The young woman started to work for us, and she was, to use the proverbial employer's expression, a jewel. She was perennially reliable and easy going, seemingly as happy answering telephones as she was turning out a perfectly typed letter. (My first secretary had tended to make a letter look like something that had been found in a bottle at the bottom of the ocean.) Nothing about the job rattled her. Except for one thing, however: Me. I could not get over the notion that this young woman was my mission, that it was my job to infuse her with ambition, raise her consciousness and realign her

politics. "Why can't you leave well enough alone?" the fellow who had coaxed me to hire her asked. "Why can't you be happy working with someone who's different from you, who isn't a budding Gloria Steinem or a young Barbara Walters?" I knew he was right, but I couldn't seem to stop trying to shape her in my own (not to mention Gloria Steinem's and Barbara Walters') image, not until the day she left us to work for a non-profit foundation which did something like sponsor scholarships for indigent skiers and promised to send her to Vail twice a year.

My third secretary I again hired myself, so she turned out to be remarkably similar to my first secretary: bright, ambitious and draining. I was, I'm afraid, still looking more for a soulmate than a secretary, and more for approval than for skills applied in my behalf. This time, however, I succeeded in getting what I thought I wanted. At last I had found a friend. The trouble was that we found we liked each other so much that we usually got more accomplished in the way of conversation than in the way of work. Which was a problem, because work was the thing we were being paid to do, and when, inevitably, we *had* to work, I felt funny about asking her to do things, about turning from good ole BJR into The Boss. I invariably became either cajoling or sternly demanding, neither of which endeared me to her. Luckily, our story had a happy ending. I decided to leave the job before our growing friendship was completely shredded. (This was not the *cause* of my leaving, understand. Even I will go just so far to be liked.) And we were able to retain our relationship outside the office, where, I rather suspect, it belonged in the first place.

It would be nice to report that, finally, I have learned the ins and outs of being a boss. But I haven't. I'm still as rotten at it as I ever was, which causes me some pain to admit to myself. For one thing, it lessens my chances of ever running ITT. Power, even the minimal power of having a secretary, still frightens and confuses me. I was born before the revolution, after all, and was taught to please rather than direct, to follow rather than lead. The ability to command easily and with grace was not inbred in us ladies who grew up in sheath skirts. We have got to acquire it, like a taste for anchovies, and so far I haven't gotten the knack. However, even though I'm still a terrible person to work for, even though I still have a quixotic, near schizophrenic need to be loved while at the same time serviced, and am alternately overbearing and overindulgent, things are a little easier these days—now that I'm self-employed.

Bette-Jane Raphael is a free-lance writer based in New York.

GOOD BOSS

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FORSAKING YOUR PAST

Ilene Leff, who, before she became Director of Executive Resources at Revlon was a consultant in personnel problems for many Fortune 500 companies, feels that "you get locked into your past experiences. There really is a need to train people to be bosses, but half the battle is to overcome past experiences either with a boss or as one, and this could include leadership experiences as far back as high school."

Like children who swear they'll be different from their parents when they become parents themselves, managers who—consciously or unconsciously—swinging to the opposite pole may find themselves hung up on their own good intentions. Again and again, the people we spoke to recalled the role model on whom they'd patterned their managing style or had rejected.

"One year in which I aged twenty," remembers a former secretary, "I had a boss who was enormously destructive toward anyone who worked under her. She'd throw your work back in your face and say, 'No. It's not good. When will you ever learn?' I decided after that I'd never do to somebody what she did. As a result, I once inherited someone who was extremely inept and I thought if I told her again and again to redo things she'd stop making the astonishing errors she made. When I finally blew up, she was amazed at how bad she'd been at her job. I'd tried so hard not to be cruel that I ended up being obscure."

Once you've detached yourself from your past and set your own management style, says Ms. Leff, there are certain basic operating principles every boss should follow. "The key word is *delegate*. maintain the right to make final decisions, but give the lesser tasks away to your subordinates." And that isn't easy, as many a new boss has found.

Many people find it difficult as well as frightening to trust their subordinates to do the job. "I keep telling myself not to nag them," says one, "to stop looking over their shoulders. But I hate to let them alone when their work reflects on me. Yet, I hired them because I thought they could do the job, so why don't I just let them do it?"

"My first boss was very good at her job and was a wonderful mentor," recalls another woman. "I learned a great deal from her. She was conscientious to a fault, and it was a fault. She practically drove me crazy because she picked over every little thing I did, and everybody else's work, too. We were all a bit resentful. I'm sure the general attitude would have been better if she'd given us more rein and less scrutiny. As it was, we never grew up: she was always the teacher and we were always the students. She'd have been a whole lot happier herself if she'd been less compulsive."

On the other hand, delegating has to be done for the right reason. One woman remembers a boss everyone started out loving because he gave them absolute freedom and total responsibility, yet they ended up hating him "because after a while we realized he was so generous because he didn't care about anything and didn't want to have to do any work."

Some people feel the inability to delegate responsibility is classically a woman's problem. "Men may concentrate on things in the office," says a rising executive woman, "but then they tend to go home, put their feet up and let their wives take over, even though their wives may have been working all day in an office, too. I think because women are so subtly trained to look out for all the details, the little bits and pieces, to put all their ducks in a row, that they find it hard to let those pieces go."

But there are some pieces that should never be let go. It's one thing to delegate the chores, but a good boss always maintains final responsibility and never dele-

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