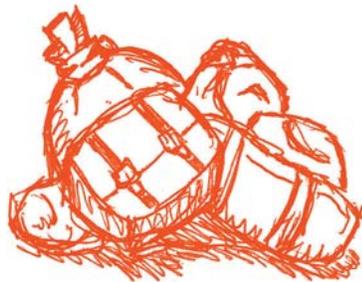
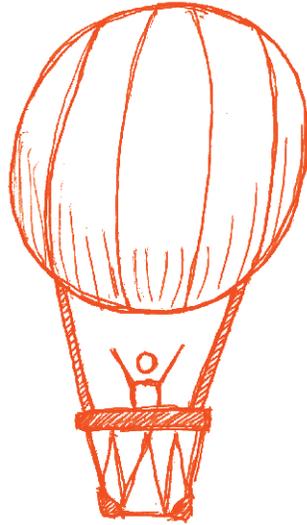


Tammy Dewar, Ph.D.

HOW TO FORGIVE YOUR BOSS

OR ANYONE WHO HAS
DONE YOU WRONG





How to Forgive your Boss

Or Anyone Who Has
Done You Wrong

by Tammy Dewar, Ph.D.



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Preface

From a very young age, I have been involved in helping people learn. My earliest experience was when I was twenty and worked with farmers and their summer students, to provide them with a farm-safety orientation on behalf of the Alberta provincial government. I was both energized and terrified by this experience. Back then, I had no formal training or education and simply followed my intuition. I knew I needed to gain the trust of these farmers by tapping into their vast expertise, instead of telling them what to do. I also realized that most of what they needed to do to keep safe they already knew; the challenge was in following safety procedures when time, resources, and a fearless spirit encouraged short cuts.

I now hold a Ph.D. in adult learning and a professional coaching designation. I have spent countless hours developing my facilitation and coaching skills ... and I am still energized and terrified by the complexities, challenges, and rewards of helping people learn and transform their lives. Thirty-some years ago, those farmers and I were grappling with the fundamental human paradox of embracing ideas and behaviours that are dangerous to us and ignoring those that might help us. Even now, I continue to be fascinated by this creative tension in each of us.

Today, my husband and I run a consulting company in Victoria, Canada, which specializes in leadership development and executive coaching. Corporations in both the public and private sectors hire us to help them create positive work cultures, and develop their leaders and teams. Sometimes organizations hire us because they are in some trouble and they need help; other times they hire us because they are doing well, but want to do something more or different. Whatever the initial reason, helping people to unearth and transform how they think and act in regards to their challenges is a fundamental part of what we do.

In the course of my career, I have worked with or heard about many bosses. Sadly, most of these stories are negative. I have heard of mean bosses, bullying bosses, unfair bosses, unethical bosses, cheap bosses, inept bosses...the list goes on and on. If there is one theme that runs through almost all of my coaching conversations, it is about bosses who are making lives miserable. I relate to that conversation as I was someone who engaged in it for most of my twenties and thirties. Happily, that is not me anymore and hopefully that won't be you anymore. There is a way to transform our negative experiences.

This book, then, is for anyone who has had a bad experience with a boss and who wants to move forward but doesn't know how, or who has tried but hasn't been successful. It's for people who really want to get on with their lives and are open to viewing the situation as a learning opportunity. It is not about finding a way to expose a bad boss, finding tricky ways to manipulate a bad boss, or coming up with a foolproof plan to get your boss fired. This book is not for you if you are intent on revenge and are looking for justification. If you are intent on vengeance, watching the entire five seasons of *Breaking Bad* in one marathon session might be a better fit.

Given the nature and sensitivity of forgiving your boss, the stories I tell here are compilations taken from many different situations. They did not unfold exactly as I present them, but major elements of each story happened at some point with someone. I have rearranged the details, including the ages and genders of individuals, and the sectors and sizes of organizations. I have done this to preserve the anonymity of the people and organizations with whom I have worked.

While I am an academic, I did not want this to be an academic book, and so I have written it in an informal manner. The concepts and activities included are a compilation of over twenty years of experience as an adult educator and coach. I developed each activity based on my experiences, but they draw on the learning of many researchers and colleagues. It would be near to impossible to identify all of these people, and so I have included a references section at the end of the text to identify the sources that have been most influential to my thinking and my practice.

All of the drawings in the book are mine. I challenged some “I can’t draw” demons a few years ago and started a visual blog at pixpired.com. I acknowledge the folks at Neuland for their bikablo guides and Manuela Bernard of Rocketpics for her iPhone app. They provided the inspiration for a lot of the images I’ve used.

I hope *How to Forgive Your Boss* helps you find your way back to yourself and gets your boss out of your head and spirit.

Acknowledgements

As many authors acknowledge, there were a lot of people standing beside me as I wrote, and so, in terror of missing or offending anyone, here goes:

A big thanks to all of my clients who entrust me with their stories and believe I can help them. It is an honour to do the work I do.

Thanks to all of my colleagues over the years, especially those at Royal Roads University. I feel blessed to have worked with and learned from so many talented people.

Thanks to Michele Breuer of the Victoria Executive Centre for hosting a Shareshop in June 2014 when I first tested out the idea of *How to Forgive Your Boss* in a twenty-minute presentation. Thanks too for providing your Ideas Room when I couldn't work at home because I got too distracted! Your learning spaces are a gift to many.

Thanks to my coach, Kathleen Tribe, for your truly amazing ability to ask the right question and say the right thing at the right time. Thanks also to Sherry LeBlanc for your coaching and friendship as I worked through a challenging time in my career. My work with both of you has been healing and transformational.

The Haven Institute on Gabriola Island has been a catalyst for some life-changing learning and growth, and I doubt I could have even contemplated a book without attending some of their transformative programs. It is fitting that the bulk of this book was written there.

A big thanks to Danielle Pope, my book coach, who came into my life at a most opportune time. Without your coaching and support I would never have turned this idea into a book. You were pivotal to my coming to understand what was holding me back.

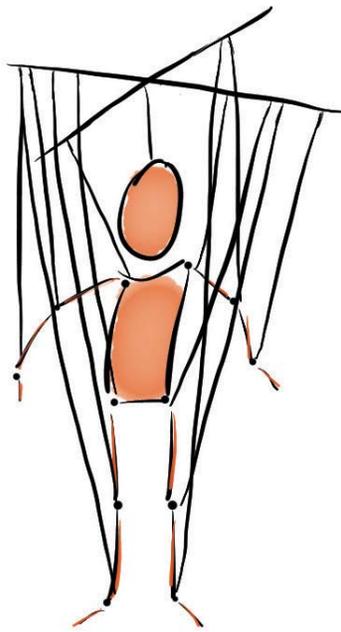
Thanks to the people who piloted the initial e-course. Your feedback and insights were invaluable in fleshing out the concepts. Particular thanks go out to all of those people who read the first draft: Mel Macleod, Scarlett Verjinschi, Richard Hobbs, Nicholas Cioran, Claire Abbott, and Dave Whittington. Your suggestions greatly improved many aspects of the book.

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To my “hosers,” Claire Abbott and Dave Whittington. You have spent more time listening to me obsess about this book over dinners and drinks than anyone should ever have to. I can't

thank you enough for the laughs, memories, and unconditional cheerleading and support.

Finally, I have to thank my husband, Dave Whittington, a third time. Honey, you have indeed helped make my dreams come true — as you said you would on our wedding day.



how to
FORGIVE
your boss

(or anyone who has done you wrong)

Chapter 1 – The Way Out

“Without forgiveness life is governed by ... an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation.” — Roberto Assagioli

I was flying home to Victoria after coaching a particularly challenged team in Alberta when *How to Forgive Your Boss* got a hold of me and wouldn't let go. Given my early career as a high school English teacher, I always imagined writing the next great novel, or given my latest career as an executive-leadership coach, the next great leadership book — not a how-to book on forgiveness. But there it was, and it wouldn't go away. This book had a voice and energy that transcended any intention on my part.

I had been hired by a private sector organization to work with the team, because while they were high performers and valuable to the organization, they were also contributing to low morale in the workplace and were quite stressed. They were chronically unhappy, expressed this freely and often in organizational surveys, and attributed their unhappiness to the actions of their boss's boss, who had made an egregious budget decision that negatively affected how they did their work.

I had just spent the better part of two days witnessing the angst and pain of the team because of this boss's action, which had

been taken over two years earlier. I was at a standstill as I had tried all of the coaching tools in my kit, and the team still seemed stuck. I found myself asking, “What would forgiveness look like for this team?” That question stopped everyone. You could feel the energy shift.

The light bulb went on for some and for others, the question ignited their rage. “Forgiveness,” one man said in disgust. “After what he did, you want me to condone his behaviour and forgive him?”

“Forgiveness doesn’t mean you condone someone’s behaviour,” I heard myself say.

“Well, what does it mean?” he demanded.

“It means you set yourself free,” I suggested. He looked really perplexed.

But My Boss is an Alien...



If you’re thinking at this point that this book isn’t for you, as your boss is an alien and you would rather file a grievance (and maybe slash his/her car tires) than forgive him or her, don’t despair. The range of emotions you feel is pretty

normal, and if you can hang in for a while longer I can help you think about and work with the situation in a different way. This will allow you to make thoughtful decisions that protect and strengthen you in the short and long term.

“Just like some of those Twelve-Step programs and the Serenity Prayer, you need to let go of the things you cannot control,” said another woman. She had spent the entire two days crossing her arms, sighing heavily, staring me down, and fidgeting with her phone. Her features softened as she said this, and she made friendly eye contact with everyone for the first time in two days. The proverbial penny had dropped it seemed, at least for her.

“I don’t know about forgiveness,” chimed another person. “All I know is that we have wasted a lot of time in the past two days revisiting something that happened a long time ago. I have moved on so I can focus on what we need to do, but I will never forgive him and I won’t forget.”

“I don’t see how forgiveness can set me free. Sounds like a bunch of New Age bull to me,” said the perplexed man.

What more was there to say? It was at the very end of our time together, and I really didn’t know where to go next. “It’s just something to think about,” I suggested and moved on to our final activity.

It was an uncomfortable ending and the idea of forgiveness wouldn’t go away. I found myself reflecting on my coaching with individuals and teams over the years, and I realized that if there was one theme, that was it. Somewhere in almost everyone’s story was the tale of a bad boss. I had asked many people what it would take to help them let something go, but I had never used the word forgiveness in a professional setting. I wondered about the difference between forgiveness and letting go and began to suspect that letting go engages and calms our rational minds, but that forgiveness releases our souls. Letting go works on the myriad of small things that are part of daily life, but forgiveness seems to be the only way out of experiences that run so deep, they disturb us at our essence.

My Story

I am no stranger to the idea of bad bosses. I spent my twenties and early-thirties hopping from job to job, only to encounter bad bosses at each turn. Each time I left a job, there were bad vibes, regrets, and unfinished business, and I ended up feeling bruised and wounded. I crashed through my twenties challenging anyone in authority, thinking that there were no good bosses anywhere; that the old quote “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” was alive and well in these modern days. At age twenty-seven, completely burned out and thinking I was a lousy educator, I quit my high school teaching job — the job that was supposed to be my lifelong career. I spent the next few years just making a living, trying to figure out who I was and what I was supposed to do.

And then I had an epiphany. I was sitting in yet another boss’s office, hearing her say much the same thing as the others had, when it occurred to me. The only constant in all of these experiences was me. Perhaps I was a bad employee — not the other way around. So I stopped the internal chatter about how bad this boss was, and really started listening. I had an almost out-of-body experience as I started to see me from my boss’s perspective.

It was humbling. I realized how narrow and selfish my perspective had become and just how unruly, angry, and stubborn I was. And then I imagined my boss dealing with the other twenty people who reported to her and ... well ... let’s just say I was embarrassed by my self-absorption, and I decided it was time to start learning, instead of defending. I eventually became good friends with that boss and healed that particular relationship. I don’t know that I actively thought, *I forgive you and I forgive*

myself, but in hindsight, what I now understand about forgiveness was definitely present.

It was about this time that as part of a master's degree in Adult Education at the University of Calgary, I was taking a course in transpersonal psychology (often called spiritual psychology) and studying the work of Carl Jung. I was fascinated by his work on the shadow, that unconscious part of ourselves (whether positive or negative), which we don't identify with or own, and therefore, often project onto others. My experience with the boss was definitely an encounter with my shadow; I came to own my role in that relationship, as opposed to believing that she was deliberately doing things to me and making me miserable.

This was a pivotal moment in my life, because I realized just how much power I could tap into, and how I could not only make my work life better but create the life I yearned for and wanted to live. I hope to inspire you with what I have learned about forgiveness and give you a roadmap for this rather messy and uncomfortable journey.

About Forgiveness

I attended church every Sunday while growing up, and so my own history with forgiveness stems from religious roots. I do not approach forgiveness here, however, from a spiritual or religious perspective. It is a practical matter to me. Our workplaces and work are increasingly complex and messy, and thus the potential for harm is high, despite everyone's best intentions. We owe it to ourselves to explore the practical role that forgiveness can play in our own power and our enjoyment of work.

My own definition of forgiveness is the willingness to let go of past wrongs and feelings of anger and vengeance, in order

to reclaim our power. Forgiveness often involves people actually wishing the offender well, but in professional contexts, just letting go of all of the negative emotion and approaching each day as a blank slate can lead to a much-improved quality of work life.

Forgiving your boss does NOT involve you saying or doing anything with your boss, unless, as part of the forgiveness process, you come to the conclusion that a face-to-face interaction with your boss could be helpful to both of you. You will NOT be asked in this book to say anything to your boss about the work you are doing to forgive him/her. That is an important point. Forgiving your boss is all about the inner work you do to get back your power.

Forgiving your boss does NOT mean you condone the behaviour or words of your boss. That, too, is an important point. This book is not about judging the relative “badness” of what your boss has said or done. Whatever it was, it had a powerful impact on you or you wouldn’t be reading this book! If a boss has said or done something that has left you hurt, confused, or questioning your own competence or career choice, then it has also compromised your own view of who you are and of your worth in the workplace. Forgiveness allows you to get yourself back.

Forgiving your boss also does NOT mean you have to stay in a toxic work environment. It means you do the important internal work, so that you do not, like I did, live out a pattern of bad bosses. It means you set boundaries and perhaps even leave the organization, but you do so with a sense of your own power. If you leave, you leave feeling like you’ve made an important decision for yourself, instead of feeling bitter, confused, and bruised.

When a boss has said or done something to hurt us, this often creates feelings of humiliation and powerlessness. While the

particular event has happened in the past, we carry forward the emotions, and they become a part of our present identities. Forgiveness allows us to accept the past and stop wishing that it were different.

In both personal and professional settings, as I examined my own experiences with forgiveness, as well as those of the people with whom I have worked for the past twenty years, a model emerged to guide the important inner work that is forgiveness. This book is structured around the word POWER, with each chapter offering anecdotes, questions, and activities to guide you on the path of reclaiming your power.

Forgiveness = POWER



- P — Price you pay: The fact that you pay a price for working for a boss who's done you wrong might seem like an obvious statement, and it is. But the other, less obvious,

meaning is the price you pay for NOT forgiving a boss who's done you wrong.

- O — Own your story: Unless we learn how to forgive our bosses, we are doomed to living out a “story” of unhealthy patterns that disempower us and leave us feeling like victims.
- W — Widen your view: We often see only a portion of the organizational complexity in which our bosses work. Our bosses are often dealing with situations, structures, and people that exert a huge influence on how they behave and the decisions they make. This also applies to the wider view of their personal lives ... we likely do not know the vast complexities of our bosses' lives.
- E — Embrace frailty: We project a lot of “ideals” on bosses and then are disappointed that they show up as human beings. We need to embrace human frailty; our own and that of our bosses.
- R — Release baggage: A large part of forgiveness is releasing negative emotions and thoughts along with the idea that the past could have been different. This allows us to reclaim our own power and live more fully in the present.

Intrigued? Visit <http://forgiveyourboss.com> to buy your copy!