Do you have a boss who acts like a demanding, stubborn, fickle, distracted, or needy child—or engages in bullying tantrums, micro-management, mood swings, or endless whining? We all have to deal with imperfect bosses. Unfortunately, some of us have to deal with bad bosses who—if you aren’t careful—can sink your career along with their own.

In Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant™ (TOT), Lynn Taylor gives you practical, real-world tactics for dealing with childish boss behavior without sacrificing your principles or exacerbating office strife. Wielding truth wrapped in hilarity, Taylor takes you behind the bossy blustering so that you can achieve your goals—and career excellence. Bosses will also benefit from this guide to gain insight on what not to do with their teams. If you are a CEO, you know instinctively that Terrible Office Tyrants (TOTs) wreak havoc in your company, harming the bottom line. A special section will help you stop TOT behavior in its tracks—for a more humanized, productive workplace.

Like you, Taylor knows childish behavior when she sees it. In fact, bad bosses and kids who act out have plenty in common. But tirades, moodiness, and demanding behavior don’t have to ruin your workday. In Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant (TOT), Taylor shows you how to build positive relationships with even the most out-of-control boss and thrive in your job. The key to success lies in dealing with a TOT much like a parent deals with a troublesome toddler.

No matter what kind of TOT you face each day, Taylor profiles them all—bossy brats to little lost lambs—and shows you how to successfully manage their behavior for the sake of your career and your sanity. Based on extensive interviews and in-depth research, this indispensable guide demonstrates that with the right approach, you can tame your TOT.

LYNN TAYLOR is a leading expert and spokesperson on career, hiring, and workplace issues, as well as an advisor and consultant to job seekers and executives. She is the founder of Lynn Taylor Consulting, where she focuses on employment, motivation, and related management issues, offering seminars and interactive workshops on these subjects. For more information, visit TameYourTOT.com.

PRAISE FOR TAME YOUR TERRIBLE OFFICE TYRANT

“Nobody understands the psychodynamics of workplace relationships like Lynn Taylor. With uncanny insight and laugh-out-loud humor, this gem will help you realize that you’re not alone. Now you can tackle emotional control and be unstoppable in your career success!”
—DAPHNE ROSE KINGMA, relationship expert, six-time Oprah guest, bestselling author of ten books, including Loving Yourself

“CEOs, managers, and employees who read Lynn Taylor’s eye-opening, clever book will want to take immediate steps to better channel human behavior and create a more vibrant, productive workplace. Every firm will want to ensure that they are not a TOT incubator!”
—SABEER BHATIA, co-founder of Hotmail, visionary, and developer of Nano City, the “Silicon Valley of India”

“Insightful and practical, this manual is for anyone (and that means everyone) with a boss. Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant contains sage advice on how small adjustments in your behavior can turn even the worst TOT into Mr. Nice Guy.”
—ROBIN KOVAL, bestselling coauthor of The Power of Nice; coauthor of the newly released The Power of Small; and President, The Kaplan Thaler Group

“Lynn Taylor’s timeless guide, laced with sharp wit, is the perfect antidote for employees surrounded by the gamut of office antics! It’s also a wake-up call for senior managers who want to improve the bottom line.”
—ALAN ENGELSON, apparel consultant, former senior vice president, Nautica
Tame Your Terrible Office
Tyrant™ (TOT)
Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant™ (TOT)

How to Manage Childish Boss Behavior and Thrive in Your Job

Lynn Taylor
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Acknowledgments

IT HAS BEEN a thrill to make this seven-year passion become a reality. The ability to help others through my workplace perspectives and experience, while providing some levity, is a true privilege.

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Introduction

There are great bosses, and there are terrible bosses, but there is no such thing as a perfect boss. No one expects a boss to be perfect, of course, but the problem is that many, if not most, people get stuck having to deal with those less-than-ideal managers. So what can you do to solve this dilemma?

After working in corporate America for 20 years, and more than half of them with companies that help people find meaningful jobs, I decided to step out to find my own passion in a way that would be personally fulfilling.

I began typing a list of what mattered to me most professionally and how I could contribute to society. I quickly realized that nothing in my own professional career would be more rewarding than to provide employees with tools and shortcuts on getting ahead.

I wanted to share my insights and experience with people to help them advance in their careers, but I knew that I had to offer some humor along the way, too.

And suddenly, it all came together. I had often joked that some bosses were just like little kids, but it soon occurred to
me that it wasn’t just an off-handed quip . . . it was true! I had discovered my passion: helping workers better understand their managers by seeing the “hidden child” behind the often-frustrating behaviors of their supervisors. I saw striking parallels between troublesome bosses and toddlers—and not surprisingly, the solutions were frequently very similar as well.

At that point, the Terrible Office Tyrant (TOT) was born.

It was a natural outcome of having parented two boys, remembering vividly my babysitting and toddler-rearing days—and having “lived” and researched workplace behavior in various executive capacities. On reflection of my own corporate experience, I realized that I had unknowingly applied parenting techniques in the workplace for many years.

This “parenting” was never done in a patronizing way. Instead, I tried to put myself into my boss’s shoes. I looked for the raw, childlike motives behind their actions and personality traits, both challenging and endearing: the characteristics that comprise a TOT. Then I quietly applied the basic discipline techniques that worked most effectively with young kids.

Once I started charting how this notion worked so incredibly well in the office, I knew I had to validate my premise by researching toddler behavior more thoroughly. I talked to or videotaped more than 100 people, and independently commissioned surveys of thousands of others over a seven-year period to confirm the parallels.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. In fact, everyone I spoke to responded with a hearty laugh, and some version of: “Oh, I could give you tons of material!”—followed by a personal story.

Shortly after analyzing the whining, fearful, stubborn types of toddlers, I had the harsh realization that I, too, had at various times been a TOT. The more I considered the similarities between TOTs and toddlers, I realized that almost all bosses behave this
way at some point. Now it was time to synthesize the solutions to the many varieties of bratty bosses and little lost lambs of the corporate world. I felt that in doing so, I could help make the workplace much more productive.

It was and continues to be a great journey.

Now, this phase of my work is done, but my adventures into the TOT world continue. I envision this as a reference guide for employees at any level who encounter one of the 20 traits outlined. I hope it will offer a “Levity Lens™” through which to view TOTs, not only in the workplace, but also in one’s personal life.

My hope, too, is that CEOs will allow the book to proliferate among the ranks of corporate managers. The results will be a more humanized workplace and enhanced profitability, creating a win-win for employees and management. Tips for CEOs are at the end of the book.

I believe that whether we’re two or fifty-two, we all have the same core emotions, desires, instincts, and yes, training needs. Each day, we have the opportunity to proactively manage the TOTs around us. By adopting a calm, rational, and professional approach at work, I believe you’ll contribute to your own career advancement, and maybe even create a more manageable workplace for others.

I hope that Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant: How to Manage Childish Boss Behavior and Thrive in Your Job will help you see that the corner office is just a palatial playpen—and that you won’t let the pinstripes and pearls fool you for one minute. With the ideas from this book, your human instincts, and corporate savvy, I believe you’ll be able to add “TOT tamer” to your many accomplishments.
Getting Started:
Advice for Employees

GETTING OUT OF BED and dragging yourself to work can be a chore even if you have the world’s greatest job. But if you’ve been hitting the snooze button repeatedly before hitting the shower, there may be something—or more likely, someone—making you want to avoid work.

If your boss acts like a bratty bully or a confused little lamb—or just seems impossible to deal with, you can now breathe a sigh of relief. You are working for a Terrible Office Tyrant (TOT) and help is on the way.

TOTs aren’t really any different from toddlers. And fortunately, once you can see that the tyrants are really just wearing training pants, that cell phones are just pacifiers, and that the conference room is just a playground, your work life will be easier to handle.
6 GETTING STARTED: ADVICE FOR EMPLOYEES

Using a “Levity Lens™,” to see the silly side of the awkward and stressful in the office, can show you that the little devils at work are just playing sandbox politics. And once you understand your boss’s quirks and strange behavior, you may not even need the snooze button. That’s where Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant (TOT) comes in.

All bosses, just like the rest of us, have vestiges of childlike behavior in them—some more than others. And that means your boss will invariably show a sign or two of being a TOT. In other words, for you to succeed and thrive at your job, you need to become a TOT tamer.

Please note: That’s TOT tamer, not TOT kicker, or TOT torturer, or any other aggressive (or arrest-worthy) monikers. The whole point of TOT taming is to “manage up”—not to get revenge on your boss, or to fight fire with fire.

You might want to think of TOT taming as a kind of parenting, minus the diapers and spitting up. Despite the lack of icky and sticky that only a toddler can offer, you still face tantrums, fear, confusion, name calling, and more in the corner office.

After all, your boss is human, too. We all have the same basic human instincts and needs. As in life, putting yourself in the other person’s shoes, listening carefully, and reading between the lines often makes a world of difference. Your boss is probably dealing with many of the same challenges that you are—and then some.

Remember, TOTs have bosses, too (aka Big TOT, not to mention Big TOT’s boss, Super TOT) who can make their lives miserable. Sure, you have deadlines and goals to achieve, but so does your TOT—who is responsible for the performance and deadlines of everyone on the team.

The tricky part about your boss’s management weaknesses and slip-ups is that you have to be sensitive about the way you address them. You can’t yell at your boss, or yank a problem away from her and say, “No, no, no, no! We never do that!” as you would with
a toddler. But just like a good parent, you can reinforce positive behavior and turn mistakes into a learning experience.

That may sound like going above and beyond the call of duty, but a little TOT taming can go a long way toward reducing angst on the job. And remember, if you aren’t someone’s boss already, you probably will be someday.

So, how do you become a certified TOT tamer? Use your good judgment, anticipate problems, stay calm and personable—and develop creative, professional solutions. Be acutely aware of your boss’s needs and be prepared to dig deeper. Ultimately, you will be rewarded for great results, meaning faster career advancement.

A stubborn boss probably doesn’t enjoy being—or even intend to be—stubborn, for example. She may just not have any other tool available to cope. If you can uncover the bigger issues that trigger TOT behavior, you might be able to solve the current problem and head off future ones as well.

Keep in mind that not all TOTs are tamable. You should never have to put up with abusive behavior, or a boss who takes advantage of you and your work. Those kinds of bosses actually transcend TOTdom—and qualify as evil. You should spend your time, energy, and creativity on getting out of that bad situation, rather than trying to fix it.

You don’t have to be your boss’s best friend to be a TOT tamer or adopt a suck-it-up mentality, either. But your relationship with your boss doesn’t have to be contentious. It can be professional, productive, and respectful. Life’s too short to live in fear of your job. Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant can help.
I

Bratty Behavior

TERRIBLE OFFICE TYRANTS (TOTS) are at their most terrible when they behave like all-out brats. When your boss morphs into monster mode, you can count on a bad day... or a bad week.

Some of the most striking parallels between toddlers and TOTs are, well, also the most obnoxious. A boss who wants a report “Now!” bears an uncanny resemblance to an unruly little kid in the supermarket candy aisle.

A child who bullies others because he’s bigger and tougher can be seen in a manager who constantly reminds his team “who’s in charge.” And yes, both TOTs and toddlers can pitch a whopper of a tantrum, although unfortunately, your boss isn’t as likely to throw himself on the ground and cry. (One can dream, though!)

Like small children, bosses like to get their way. That often involves acting out in ways that you thought were limited to little kids faced with a plate of vegetables or the threat of no more video games. To make things worse, a petulant TOT, unlike a child, has direct authority over your livelihood. That’s when Bratty Behavior is no longer just annoying... it can be life changing.

By understanding what’s behind the bluster, you can usually tame your TOT—or at the very least, mitigate unpleasant
situations. You might sometimes feel inclined to fight fire with fire, but all that does is get you fired. So be creative and “manage up” when the Terrible Twos appear in the corner office.

Inside this section of *Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant*, you’ll learn how to recognize the telltale signs of an impending brat attack—as well as how to deal with one. Each chapter includes a look at how TOTs and toddlers act out in common, a real-life story about how an employee like you dealt with a challenging boss, and a set of helpful TOT Taming Tips.
About Bragging

IT’S A BIG DAY in the office because the CEO is dropping by. You’ve not only worked 24/7 for the past three weeks to cut marketing spending as much as humanly possible—but you’ve also prepared a detailed presentation, even cleaned the office, and made snacks for all the head honchos.

Now your Terrible Office Tyrant (TOT) saunters in with Big TOT (his boss), and, the CEO. You can’t believe your ears. In under 30 seconds, your TOT has taken credit for the reduced budget, the slide presentation you slaved over, the office’s pristine look, and—oh no, he didn’t—your snicker-doodles?

Before you can register your disbelief (or even introduce yourself to the CEO), your glory hog TOT has planted the big boss in his office—and snagged all of the treats to boot. During the closed-door session, you hear phrases like: “When I saw we could cut . . .” and “Then I thought of an amazing, much cheaper way to
achieve . . . ,” punctuated by loud praise from the CEO, “Excellent! You are running a tight ship.”

By the time they emerge to go eat sushi, it’s hard to believe you even exist. Your boss has taken credit for everything. In fact, he’s painted himself to be the only functioning asset in the office.

“Yikes,” you think, “He’ll claim he invented the Internet by the end of lunch.”

But Why?

What just happened here? You realized that your boss is either the Most Powerful Man in the Universe—or the Biggest Hype in Town. When it was showtime at your office, your boss blew his own horn—at everyone else’s expense.

Self-promoting TOTs are everywhere. It’s a common trait in the working world, especially when the need to sell goes into overdrive. Talking yourself up is necessary, but, of course, there are some TOTs who escalate self-promotion, trying to elevate themselves above the rest of the world.

Often, their behavior has no ill intent—this kind of TOT simply wants attention or validation. For the most part, bragging bosses are more of a nuisance than a threat. Sometimes, though, TOTs deliberately put down others to bolster their own egos—or ensure their perception of worth in the eyes of their TOT. Like kids who shout, “Your painting is stupid, mine is better,” the worst of the blustering bosses leave a trail of hurt feelings and ill will in their wake. Even then, it’s still more hot air rather than an egomaniacal power trip.

Let’s look at the parallels between braggart bosses and kids who sing their own praises:
Bragging Toddler Behavior | Bragging TOT Behavior
---|---
He brags to his preschool classmates, “Teacher is my friend and not yours.” | He brags to anyone within earshot how tight he is with the new CEO. But their only encounter was at a meeting where the CEO asked him to take notes.

She scoots down the slide 49 times, yelling “Watch me! I’m the fastest!” after every turn. If you fail to take note and applaud, she screams, “Mommy, watch me!” | In order to “teach” public speaking skills to the staff, he shows a DVD of his speech to a youth group 49 consecutive times. He stops the video frequently and says, “Let’s watch again!”

When no one is looking, she draws crayoned circles all over the living room walls. She pulls you into the room. “Look!” she crows. “Best circles ever!” | Your boss grabs the client proposal you just completed. Her edits: adding the word “maybe” to every bullet point, weakening your pitch. She boasts that she transformed it into “a work of art.”

Your toddler tells his little sister, “I can hit the ball over the fence and you can’t. Na na, na na na.” | You challenge his decision to take over a project that requires your specific skill set. He says, “I’ll take the lead on this baby.” You swear you heard a “Na na, na na na” at the end, too.

Mild gloating is usually tolerable. We all have egos and a little positive self-promotion can be a boost. Bragging only crosses the line when the frequency or volume gets ratcheted up—or when reality starts to distort.

You may find yourself wincing every time your boss struts in your direction to name-drop his many “connections” up the corporate ladder, not to mention politics and Hollywood.
You may cringe when the laundry list of notable career achievements gets further inflated, thinking: “Wow, if he won ‘Employee of the Year’ as often as he said, he must have started here in kindergarten—or maybe he’s actually 112 years old!”

But your irritation might finally morph into fury when his boasting comes loaded with poisoned arrows aimed your way—or even worse, when he claims your accomplishments as his own. That’s the point at which you have to stop tuning out your TOT, and start building a defensive shield.

(For help dealing with true center-of-the-universe TOT behavior, check out Chapter 7 on Self-Centeredness.)

Bragging begins in late toddlerhood and is a normal developmental stage. The child learns she can do something new, and her excitement spills over into what sounds boastful, but might simply be celebration.

When she says “I made the picture,” she’s displaying pleasure and enthusiasm in her discovery that she can create something. And when she compares herself favorably to her peers—"I'm bigger/smarter/prettier than you are”—she’s working out exactly who she is. She doesn’t necessarily want to make others feel small and ugly—she just hasn’t discovered the harm her words create nor does she have the capacity for empathy yet.

Most kids figure out early that nobody likes a show-off, so they learn to temper their boastful behavior, but only after testing it. At some point, kids learn that more frequent or louder boasting works even less effectively than regular bragging. They dial it down and keep the big boasts in check.

“Tell Me I’m Great!”

TOTs who brag like toddlers have never resolved their identity issues or developed a capacity for empathy. They also have never
figured out that most people want to crawl under a rock when listening to them.

Most likely, they didn’t receive enough reassurance growing up, and so they’re still seeking it. They brag in order to find out if you actually do appreciate or respect them. They need to hear, “Yes, you are the most brilliant negotiator on the crew,” because at age seven, they didn’t hear “You are the best kickball player” often enough. The trouble is that many braggart TOTs seem to have an endless need for reassurance, and you can’t make up for their childhood deprivation. (Check out Chapter 19 on Neediness for more ideas on dealing with deprived TOTs.)

The problem increases in competitive situations, where the TOT feels threatened. He fears looking bad next to colleagues, so he tries to convince you that he’s better than they are, and better than you are.

---

**True TOT Tales**

**Par for the Course**

Selma works for a small computer software firm in Denver. If her boss ever heard a rumor that he was a big braggart, he’d probably freeze in his wingtips from surprise, because the behavior has become so ingrained. Here’s Selma’s story.

My boss has no shame. He’s a big golfer and a bigger showoff, and I’m sick of hearing him cock-a-doodle-do about how great he did in his latest game. He sneaks out at 4:00 PM every Wednesday to play golf, which annoys me because I’m working 14-hour days just to keep my job intact. Then he justifies it by saying he makes all these great connections, and that golf is “integral” to his sales numbers.

Thursday morning is when the golf gloating starts. I know nothing about golf, but he makes me listen anyway. Then, in the
usual “the golf course is my office” riff, he goes on about the
deals he clinched and who he bonded with the day before. I know
deals get done over golf, but the thing is, my boss has not landed
one client from these outings!

This week, he came in beaming. He was especially psyched
because he had golfed with a “key guy” from a Fortune 1000
company. He said we’d be a “shoo-in” for a big deal because
they talked for hours and “literally hit it off.”

Later, as I dropped off a file on his desk, I noticed a scribble
on a piece of paper mentioning that same Fortune 1000
company and the next golf date. It turns out this new golf pal
was a “Management Trainee.” Wow!

I never called him on the fact that no business ever came
in as a result of his networking acumen. But I started to use the
inevitable weekly boss visits to get his sign-off on my ever-growing
list of pending projects. I learned that I could get a lot done with
one secret phrase, “How was your game?” Granted, I had to
endure a bunch of sand-trap stories, but he became so agreeable
that I’d wrap up work before anyone else. I actually learned
about golf because of that. But I’m still skeptical about golfers.

Although Selma couldn’t escape her boss’s bragging, she was
able to harness it for her own use. Fortunately, her boss didn’t stoop
to boast at her expense. He didn’t put her down for not having
a fancy club membership or for being not being “connected” like
he is—he just wanted an admiring audience.

TOT-Taming Tips: Bragging

There are only so many times you can listen to tales about how
your TOT impressed all the honchos of the universe with her
charm and wit. Though you may understand why your TOT puffs
herself up, she’ll probably strain your patience after a while, partic-
ularly if she points out the many ways in which she surpasses you.
How can you survive the braggadocio in your office? Here are some tips to deal with the blowhards and the windbags at work. In fact, they may be the best tips ever. (Okay, now that’s bragging!)

DON’T DO THIS . . .

Encourage a Brag-Off. Let your TOT know that there are other TOTs out there making bigger and better claims than she is. Tell her, “Boss, when the customer service manager heard you say that our team was the greatest team ever, she said that her group was the greatest times two. And then the regional sales director said they were the greatest ‘times infinity.’ So I said you’ll face off with them in the conference room at high noon.”

Do This . . .

Help Dial It Down. Your boss truly might not be aware of the impact her competitive bragging has on others. You can let her know in a gentle way by saying something like, “It’s great news about your high score on the management aptitude test, boss. You’re amazing. I do think poor Ron was devastated when you said that you smoked him. I hope he isn’t too bummed out. Maybe you could give him a word of encouragement?”

DON’T DO THIS . . .

Crow Louder. It’s essential that you establish yourself as the smartest, fastest, coolest employee in the universe,
so that you get promoted when the time comes. Adorn your office with every diploma you ever earned, including your dog's certificates for most-improved fetcher. If you find yourself in a room full of TOTs trying to out-boast each other, walk into the middle and say, “Oh yeah? Bet you didn’t know I invented the FruitSharpener—the first pencil sharpener that emits fragrance! And a guy from IT said that I visited more web sites while working than anyone else!”

**Do This . . .**

**Model Compassionate Behavior.** Reign yourself in when you have something to boast about—and gently show your boss the friendly way to shine. Instead of making a big deal, keep your accomplishment to yourself and later, take your boss aside. Say something like, “I didn’t want to make a fuss about getting nominated to the President’s Circle because I didn’t want Randy or Joanne to feel bad. They’ve worked so hard, and are good team members, so I’d rather keep this low-key.” Hopefully, your boss will follow your example instead of jamming her achievements down everyone’s throat.

**DON’T DO THIS . . .**

**Be Your Boss’s Publicist.** If your TOT drones on about his accomplishments at every opportunity, help him get sick of hearing it himself. At every chance you get, brag for your