[Bosses with these 3 toxic habits have low emotional intelligence, Harvard-trained psychologist says](https://www.cnbc.com/2024/01/12/habits-of-bosses-with-low-emotional-intelligence-psychologist.html?__source=sharebar|email&par=sharebar)

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A boss with [high emotional intelligence](https://www.cnbc.com/2023/11/19/people-with-high-emotional-intelligence-never-do-these-things-when-talking-to-others.html) can make your job a lot easier. Working for someone who lacks that kind of empathy, however, can make even the toughest-skinned employee consider quitting.

It’s a crucial trait, both in the workplace and in life: The ability to recognize and understand emotions, regulate your behaviors, navigate different social settings and empathize with the people around you can help strengthen your relationships and even boost your self-esteem.

Emotional intelligence, also known as emotional quotient (EQ), is especially valuable in bosses, who set the tone for fellowship and communications at work.

A lack of it can significantly damage your morale and stunt your growth, says [Daniel Goleman](https://www.cnbc.com/daniel-goleman/), a Harvard-trained psychologist and author of “[Optimal: How to Sustain Personal and Organizational Excellence Every Day](https://www.amazon.com/Optimal-Sustain-Personal-Organizational-Excellence/dp/0063279762).”

Specifically, Goleman says that strong, effective leaders steer clear of these three destructive habits:

Public scoldings

Say you made a mistake during a big presentation. Instead of setting one-on-one time to discuss the matter, your boss publicly scolds you about what you did wrong — going out of their way to make an example of you.

Telltale signs of low EQ include “getting angry and ‘letting people have it,’ [or] a boss who publicly yells at and puts down a direct report,” Goleman says. “Research shows this alienates the employee, who then hates that boss.”

Forty-eight percent of HR professionals said their organization experienced “workplace violence” in 2019, including verbal harassment, yelling and intimidation, according to the [Society for Human Resource Management](https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/risk-management/survey-half-hr-pros-workplaces-experienced-violence).

Perfectionism

Pushing employees to improve is a necessary part of any boss’ job. But when it becomes a constant drumbeat, to the exclusion of positive feedback, that’s a bad sign, says Goleman.

Leaders who only see “what’s wrong with people, never what’s right,” lower the morale of their employees, Goleman says. They likely “aim this critical stance at himself, or herself, too,” he adds.

Ex-IBM CEO Ginni Rometty, for example, earned the nickname “Red Pen” by incessantly marking up and correcting her employees’ work, [she said](https://www.cnbc.com/2023/11/16/ex-ibm-ceo-ginni-rometty-perfectionism-is-a-toxic-boss-red-flag.html) at last year’s World Business Forum summit in New York. A wake-up call from a colleague helped her realize that her obsession with finding mistakes was a problem.

“One person was like, ’You know, people just don’t even want to try hard, because you’re going to change it and fix it. It’s never going to be good enough,‴ she said. “That’s pretty disabling for people ... I was disempowering them. Of course, it was never my intent, but I learned to stop it.”

If you want to make a change, you can start by helping your perfectionist boss recognize that they’re creating a negative environment — for both the workplace and themselves. They’ll either burn out or lock themselves in a cycle of endless procrastination, mental health author Morra Aarons-Mele told CNBC Make It [last year](https://www.cnbc.com/2023/02/12/how-to-fix-perfectionism-mental-health-author-morra-aarons-mele.html).

Unnecessary arguments

Workplace debates are common. People who turn those conversations into arguments particularly lack EQ — especially bosses, who are seen as workplace leaders and should know better.

Leaders who are “always arguing and never agreeing” can make their employees feel like their opinions aren’t valued, or that they’re incapable of doing their job, says Goleman.

“Getting in disputes constantly weakens the group,” he adds. It’s “better if a leader can help resolve disputes [instead].”

Instead of picking fights, professionals with high EQ validate others’ feelings and experiences, psychologist Cortney Warren [wrote on CNBC Make It](https://www.cnbc.com/2023/12/10/people-with-low-emotional-intelligence-always-use-these-phrases-harvard-psychologist.html)last month. They’re also open to changing their own perspective.

“EQ is associated with an ability to change over time as you learn and grow,” Warren wrote. “People with low emotional intelligence are often more rigid and will fight efforts to shift or evolve. Strong convictions are important, but so is being open to new possibilities.”