



## Timely Information for Personal Success

# Bosses Who Cry Wolf

By Mike Jacquart

**S**urely, you've read the Aesop's fable, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, in which a shepherd boy repeatedly tricks nearby villagers into thinking a wolf is attacking his town's flock. When a wolf actually does appear and the boy again calls for help, the villagers believe that it is another false alarm, and the sheep are eaten by the wolf. What does this have to do with the working world? Sometimes, quite a bit.

Unlike this famous story, it would probably be a stretch to say the boss out-and-out "tricks" his employees into disbelief. However, like the boy let's say the boss, we'll call him Ralph, doesn't do what he says he is going to do, and at a certain point, his employees stop believing him on most any issue. Obviously, this is NOT a good work situation, but it does happen.

In the last *Lifestyle Tips*, author Jim Bohn pointed out the importance of trust in his article, "The Cloak of Credibility." As Bohn explained:

- The workplace leader promises to get an employee a pay increase but doesn't take all of the necessary steps and drops the ball.
- The workplace leader makes a promise he/she cannot possibly keep (e.g., "You'll be promoted"). *In both of these cases, trust is eroded. Put another way, neither the boy, nor Ralph, is BELIEVED.*

Now imagine Ralph saying any or doing these things in YOUR workplace? How would YOU react if Ralph didn't follow through with the pay raise, promotion, or anything else he said he was going to do? How would your co-workers feel? Hurt? Angry?

I'd make the case it does not even have to be an actual *promise* for trust to erode, and worse. Put yourself in either of the following situations:

❖ Jim, who works in mergers and acquisitions: "Ralph, can you send me that contract to look over next week?"

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## How Do YOU Measure Up?

**Enjoy regular family meals.** This allows parents to serve as good role models, can promote more nutritious eating, and sets the stage for lively conversations. Being connected to family and/or friends is a powerful aspect of a healthy life.

**Smile and laugh out loud several times a day.** It keeps you grounded, and helps you cope with situations that would otherwise drive you crazy. Read the comics, watch a sitcom, or tell jokes to bring out those happy feelings.

**Meditate, pray, or otherwise find solace** for at least 10-20 minutes each day. Contemplation is good for your soul, helps you cope with the demands of daily life, and may even help lower your blood pressure.

**Get a pedometer and let it motivate you to walk, walk, walk.** Forget about how many minutes of activity you need; just do everything you can to fit more steps into your day. No matter how you get it, physical activity can help defuse stress, burn calories, and boost self-esteem. ■

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### Bosses Who Cry Wolf

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The next week rolls around, and Jim is still looking for that contact at week's end.

❖ Sue, who writes grants for the firm: "Ralph, I found out the deadline to apply for that big federal grant we talked about is less than two months away - June 1 to be exact. Could you let me know by May 1 if you'd like me to apply or not? That way, I should have enough time."

The middle-of-May rolls around, and Sue is still waiting for a decision.

Since timing is sometimes everything in business, it's possible Ralph may have had some good reasons for not following up. Maybe he was truly SWAMPED during the week in question. Or perhaps Ralph simply forgot. That happens, too!

If these are isolated incidents, that's not so bad. No one is perfect at following up on everything! But this becomes a problem when examples like these are more *the norm* than the exception.

And how do you think that would make you, as "an underling" feel if you worked for Ralph? Probably, that whatever you think or say, it doesn't matter because nothing will change anyway. Talk about demoralizing!

*I did not know about EAP when a situation like this happened to me. If I had, maybe I would have approached them about a course of action.*

\*\*What to do? *Perhaps* the EAP might consider a management consultation seminar on a topic such as efficiency and time management to try to get to the heart of the problem of why Ralph is so unresponsive.

\*\*Or, recognizing this might be a sticky issue to address, maybe a better approach would be to offer one-one-on-one counseling sessions for any employee who wants to confidentially discuss their lack of trust in Ralph and (likely) poor morale.

\*\*Here's another idea: How organized is Ralph? Would an electronic calendar system help? Or if he has one, does he know how to really utilize it? Does anyone take notes at meetings with clear instructions on "action steps" for follow-up purposes? If not, maybe someone should.

Whatever the possible solution, it's clear Ralph needs to change. The alternative is likely scores of employees who are sharpening up their resumes. ■

*\*\*Potential ideas for discussion purposes ONLY. May NOT reflect actual EAP advice. Mike Jacquart is the editor and publisher of "Employee Assistance Report", and he edits the "Journal of Employee Assistance" for EAPA. He has been writing about employee assistance and workplace topics and trends since 2004.*