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## **Bad bosses may just need a little help**

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Wayne Hochwarter was 20 and working in a Chicago grocery store, where it seemed the bosses never lasted too long. A seed was planted.

Now Hochwarter is the Florida State University's Jim Moran Professor of Business Administration, and he's made a career of studying the relationship between supervisor and employee: interpersonal dynamics.

His latest research shows that employees -- at least those of us fortunate enough to have jobs -- aren't happy with our bosses. We may not be plotting to kill them like the schemers in the movie "Horrible Bosses," but a lot of us wouldn't go out of our way to be friendly to them, either.

Hochwarter surveyed more than 400 mid-level employees from various industries. Among his findings: 42 percent said their boss was concerned more with saving his or her job than with employee development. Run into the boss outside the office? More than 40 percent said they wouldn't say hello.

"The real rub on a lot of this stuff is that people can't leave -- I mean, they've got nowhere to go," Hochwarter said of the economic reality facing unhappy workers.

Hochwarter wants people to consider something else: The boss doesn't always have the best tools. Often, bosses haven't been trained how to manage people, or those they do supervise aren't great employees, either.

"We take people and we put them in these situations and we give them the employee handbook, and they learn how many vacation days Tony can have, and they need to know what happens when Sally gets pregnant, but the whole notion of humanity ... we don't teach managers that," he said.

The "Horrible Bosses" film, Hochwarter said, "is not anything I'm particularly pleased about. ... I feel that most bosses are pretty darn good and they're trying hard in an environment that's not as warm and fuzzy as it used to be.

"Another twist on this: A lot of bosses don't have much to work with. You know the resources they have left, the people they have left, are fewer. And in many cases, the employees they have are not as good as they used to be -- for a lot of different reasons."

Hochwarter shared other observations in a Q & A:

Q. What's a good boss? A bad boss?

A. You could list a thousand things that are important, and of course they're different for every person. Some people want a boss who's hands-on. Other people like a boss who gets lost. ...

There are two real drivers in a lot of these (employer-employee) relationships: communications and trust.

People like to know what's going on. They like to know news. They like to have information as a resource available and deal with things good or bad. And the trust part is you kind of have this assumption that the person who is responsible for a lot of your work life ... is going to take care of you to the extent that he or she can.

Q. When you see portrayals of bosses in movies and TV shows -- "The Office," for example -- how much realism do you see there?

A. That kind of stuff, or course, tends to be exaggerated. ... However, what we are seeing, not in my research, but there's some harsh crap -- bullying -- more of that kind of stuff going on. ...

Q. You say the current environment is also tougher on bosses. Are bosses being forced into being the bad guy?

A. I don't think it's quite that bad. I think they have considerable input into how a person does a job; how well they do a job; the resources they have to do their job; the level of competency. ... Some of the layoff things are just the way it is. ... Maybe their whole unit got caught or it's the last person in -- that kind of stuff. It's not always performance-related.

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