

## **What should you do if your boss doesn't like you?**

**By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.**

Watch your back. It is difficult for people to overcome negative personal feelings toward someone in the workplace. Consider what causes animosity between two people.

Bad chemistry is one thing. There's no basis for it. If I'm the boss, I can't explain it; I just don't like you, and I never will. Imagine how I'm likely to treat you if there's bad chemistry between us.

Different value systems is another. I'm a middle aged, conservative suburbanite. You're a young, body-pierced urbanite. We see the world in different ways and may be unwilling to see the world through the other's eyes. Our attitudes are changeable, but we both must be willing to overlook the surface differences that separate us. Bemused tolerance follows dislike, and affection can follow that.

Then there's the fact that I (still the boss) didn't pick you. I inherited you from the last guy in the job. I'm flamboyant; you're bossy. I'm detail-oriented; you're careless. In other words, we don't make a good team; we don't complement each other. I'm not leaving this job, and I want you gone, so I show you in many ways how I dislike you.

Otherness could also be the basis for dislike. You're a different race, creed or color. Hardcore prejudices are hard to overcome.

So, what do you do? If it's bad chemistry or "didn't pick you," those negative feelings rarely change. If you can get a different boss, do. With the existing one, you could work your way to an uneasy truce, but bosses often take after the employee, with replacement in mind.

With different value systems or otherness, familiarity goes a long way to changing feelings. I (still your boss) may never overcome my deep-seated prejudices, but that doesn't mean I can't be a grown-up and work well with you, appreciating you in some ways. It won't be wasted effort to you work toward mutual understanding and congeniality.

So, what do you do if your boss doesn't like you? Patience and forbearance don't solve this problem. Action can.

- Hold tight to your self-confidence. A boss who doesn't like an employee often tries to make this look like a performance problem or to make the employee angry; the objective is to get you to leave.
- Keep your performance up. It's amazing how fast the unaware employee can slip.
- Keep yourself in view of the boss' boss. The main source for that upper manager's impression is your boss, who often bears bad tidings of your performance. Make sure the big guy sees a different, more positive picture.

- Work your relationships. You'll keep a perspective of yourself as a good employee. You'll remember you have friends. You might be able to find a way out and into a different part of the organization.
- Get outside help, from a mentor or counselor. I've seldom seen people steer this whitewater effectively alone.

You think this is going to last a lifetime, but it won't. The parties involved can't stand it. The boss will get rid of you, you'll quit, or one of you will get transferred.