



7 Tips for Dealing With a Boss You Really Don't Like in HVAC & Building Automation

Editor's Note: This is inspired by career oriented advice from Junkee, adapted specifically for the high visibility world of HVAC and BAS.

Working in HVAC, building automation, controls, and mechanical construction can be demanding enough without having a difficult relationship with your boss.

Whether you're a BAS technician dealing with a micromanaging service manager, an HVAC salesperson whose numbers are constantly being questioned, a project manager dealing with shifting priorities, or a service operations leader navigating pressure from above, your relationship with your manager can have a major impact on your job satisfaction and career.

Not every difficult boss is a bad boss. Some are under pressure, some have poor communication skills, and some simply have a management style that doesn't align with yours. But when a difficult relationship begins affecting your performance, reputation, or long-term career, it's time to take action.

Here are seven ways HVAC and building automation professionals can deal with a boss they don't like, without unnecessarily damaging their career.

1. Step Back and Assess the Situation

Before deciding that your boss is the problem, take a step back and look at what's actually happening.

In HVAC and BAS, managers often operate under significant pressure. A service manager may be dealing with emergency calls, technician shortages, customer complaints, and profitability concerns. A sales leader may be under pressure to hit quarterly numbers. A project manager may be juggling labor, materials, subcontractors, schedules, and demanding customers.

That pressure can sometimes affect how someone communicates.

Ask yourself:

- Is this a temporary problem or an ongoing pattern?
- Is my boss treating everyone this way or primarily me?
- Are expectations actually clear?
- Am I meeting deadlines and commitments?
- Is the issue personality-related, performance-related, or organizational?



- Is my manager demanding, or genuinely unreasonable?

For example, a BAS programmer may feel like their manager is constantly checking on their projects. But if multiple projects are behind schedule or customers are escalating commissioning issues, the manager may simply be responding to legitimate business problems.

On the other hand, if expectations continually change, instructions aren't communicated clearly, or you're consistently blamed for problems outside your control, there's a different issue at play.

Don't make a career decision based on one bad week. Look for patterns.

2. Learn What Drives Your Boss Crazy

Every manager has certain things that frustrate them. Some managers hate missed deadlines. Others can't stand surprises. Some want constant communication, while others expect employees to operate independently. Understanding your manager's priorities can make your working relationship much easier.

For example:

BAS Technician or Programmer: If your manager expects detailed documentation, make sure point lists, graphics, sequences, and commissioning notes are consistently updated.

HVAC Sales Professional: If your sales manager focuses heavily on pipeline activity, don't wait until the end of the month to explain why your numbers are behind. Communicate early.

Project Manager: If your manager hates schedule surprises, communicate potential material delays, labor issues, and change orders before they become problems.

Service Coordinator: If your service manager prioritizes response time, keep them informed when dispatching issues or technician availability could affect customers.

Estimator: If your manager is highly focused on margins, make sure your proposals clearly account for labor, equipment, subcontractors, and potential project risks.

You don't have to completely change how you work to accommodate your boss. But understanding what matters most to them can eliminate unnecessary conflict.

3. Get Important Instructions in Writing

This is particularly important in HVAC, BAS, construction, and service environments. Projects change. Customers change their minds. Equipment gets substituted. Schedules move. Scope changes. And verbal instructions can easily become different interpretations once a project gets underway.



If your boss gives you an important instruction verbally, document it.

For example:

"Just confirming our conversation today: I'll move forward with the revised controls sequence, and we'll hold the graphics changes until the customer approves the additional scope."

That simple email can prevent a major disagreement later.

Documentation is especially valuable when:

- Project scope changes
- Deadlines move
- Responsibilities change
- Customers request additional work
- Sales commitments affect operations
- Equipment selections change
- Labor or staffing decisions are made
- Your manager gives you conflicting priorities

This isn't about building a case against your boss. It's about creating clarity. Good documentation protects both sides.

4. Don't Let a Difficult Boss Damage Your Professional Reputation

One of the biggest mistakes you can make is allowing frustration with your manager to affect your work. The HVAC and BAS industries are relationship-driven. People move between contractors, controls companies, manufacturers, engineering firms, and service organizations. Your current boss may not be the person you work for five years from now, but your reputation will follow you.

Don't allow a difficult manager to turn you into someone you're not.

Continue to:

- Show up prepared
- Communicate professionally
- Meet commitments
- Support coworkers
- Treat customers respectfully



- Document your work
- Maintain strong relationships throughout the industry

This is especially important for professionals in niche fields such as BAS programming, controls engineering, HVAC service management, commissioning, estimating, and project management. The industry is smaller than it looks.

Your reputation is an asset. Protect it.

5. Don't Burn Bridges

You may eventually decide that you need to leave your company. If that happens, leave professionally. HVAC and building automation professionals frequently encounter former coworkers, managers, customers, vendors, and competitors again throughout their careers.

You might leave a mechanical contractor and later encounter your former boss at a controls company. The project manager you worked with may eventually become a customer. A former coworker could become a hiring manager or recommend you for your next opportunity.

So resist the temptation to make your departure personal. You don't need to tell everyone how terrible your boss was.

Instead, keep your explanation professional:

Instead of:

"My manager was impossible to work for."

Consider:

"I'm looking for an organization with a management structure and growth opportunity that better align with my long-term career goals."

There is a difference between being honest and burning a bridge.

6. Know When the Problem Needs to Be Escalated

Not every workplace disagreement requires HR or senior management. But there are situations where you shouldn't simply "deal with it." If your manager's behavior is interfering with your ability to perform your job, affecting your compensation, creating an unsafe work environment, or crossing professional boundaries, it may be time to escalate the issue.

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This can be particularly important in field-based industries.

For example, employees should not feel pressured to:

- Ignore safety procedures to meet a deadline
- Perform work they aren't qualified or trained to perform
- Misrepresent project completion
- Hide service or commissioning problems from customers
- Falsify documentation
- Violate company policies or applicable regulations
- Accept inappropriate or abusive behavior

If the issue is serious, document what happened and follow the appropriate company reporting process. For less serious management conflicts, consider speaking directly with your manager first. Sometimes the problem is simply a communication breakdown. The goal isn't to "win" against your boss.

The goal is to create a professional environment where you can successfully do your job.

7. Know When It's Time to Move On

Sometimes you've tried everything. You've communicated. You've adapted. You've documented expectations. You've remained professional. You've addressed the problem directly. And nothing changes.

At that point, it may be time to consider whether the job is still right for you.

For HVAC and BAS professionals, that decision shouldn't be based solely on salary.

Consider the bigger picture:

- Am I still learning?
- Is there a path for advancement?
- Do I have access to better technology and projects?
- Am I being compensated fairly?
- Do I have the tools and resources to succeed?
- Is management investing in my development?
- Do I enjoy the type of work I'm doing?
- Is the company financially and operationally healthy?



- Does the culture support high performers?
- Can I see myself working here two or three years from now?

A BAS technician may have reached the ceiling of their current position but have the skills to become a senior programmer or controls engineer elsewhere. A salesperson may have outgrown a small territory and be ready for a larger account base or leadership role. A project manager may be ready to move into operations leadership. A service manager may have the experience to become a general manager. Sometimes the problem isn't that you have a bad boss.

Sometimes you've simply outgrown the organization.

Before You Make a Move, Do Your Homework

If you decide to explore other opportunities, don't jump from one difficult situation into another. Research the company. Talk to people who have worked there. Understand the leadership structure. Ask about turnover. Find out why the position is open. Understand how success is measured. Ask about the types of projects, customers, technology, and responsibilities you'll actually be handling. Most importantly, evaluate the manager, not just the company. You aren't just accepting a new job.

You're choosing who you're going to work for.

Your Boss Matters, but So Does Your Career

A difficult manager doesn't necessarily mean you need to quit tomorrow.

In many cases, better communication, clearer expectations, stronger documentation, and a little perspective can dramatically improve the relationship. But your career shouldn't be held hostage by a toxic working environment.

HVAC, building automation, controls, and mechanical construction professionals have highly transferable skills. If you've built expertise in areas such as BAS programming, HVAC service, controls engineering, project management, estimating, sales, commissioning, or operations, there are organizations that need those skills. The key is knowing the difference between a temporary management challenge and a workplace that is consistently holding you back.

Handle the situation professionally. Protect your reputation. And when it's clear that it's time to move on, make your next move strategically, not emotionally.



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