

## DTD Episode 46 Show Notes

### Defeat *YOUR* Drama: My Boss is Constantly Complaining About Other Departments

#### Elizabeth from the U.S.

If you'd like me to share customized strategies for your drama situation go to my website <http://podcast.defeatthedrama.com/defeat-your-drama>. You can type or record your message. Use your real name or an alias for anonymity. Note that recorded or written messages may be used on the podcast.

#### **Elizabeth Writes:**

Can you offer advice for dealing with a boss who likes to complain about people in other departments? We often meet with people in another department for joint projects and updates. And after each meeting my boss likes to deconstruct what various people said, point out their mistakes, and generally complain about having to work with them. To be honest, my boss is often correct (I mean, no one is perfect) but hearing her berate these people time after time is a big downer. Plus, I actually enjoy working with some of these people. I feel trapped, like if I don't join her or if I try to defend them, she'll think I'm not a team player. But then when I do nothing or agree I feel two-faced. It's one thing when a coworker demonstrates this behavior, but it's another when it's your supervisor. Help!

Elizabeth, so sorry to hear about your struggles. Let's get you some customized solutions.

As always, In the Defeat Your Drama segments, I will provide solutions based on the information provided. I will obviously not have full details so will provide customized strategies based on what you share. Always consider your own specific circumstances before taking any action. These are suggestions not guarantees.

Elizabeth, I would agree, it always is a tougher situation when it's a boss or other higher level employee. There are still some strategies that you can try. I hope for your sake that the negativity and lack of teamwork exhibited by your boss is not a reflection of the culture of the organization. That's an even tougher spot to be in! I will assume that your boss creates this on her own.

### **#1 Reality Check**

I always instruct my clients to reality check their beliefs. You say you feel concerned that if you don't join in your boss will feel like you are not a team player. Has your boss given you reason to feel this way? In other words, is this a personal worry or assumption that has you feeling obligated to participate? Or is there evidence in anything that she's said or done that indicates she would, in fact, decide that you are not a team player if you don't join in on her complaint bandwagon?

I don't know what the answer is so I'm truly asking to get you thinking. We often make decisions based on false beliefs or assumptions. The goal is always to base decisions and actions on fact as much as possible. I want you to get clear about which it is for you.

If it's just a guilt feeling and not a fact then you have a bit more leeway with your response. If, however, there is evidence to support that she might think negatively of your job performance if you speak up, that will minimize your available responses.

In the absence of fact and for purposes of providing you some customized solutions, I will assume that she has not done anything overt to demonstrate that you would be seen in a negative light by failing to participate in her complaints

### **#2 Evaluate Her Openness to Receiving Feedback From You**

Three variables will determine the level of response I would recommend. I am providing 3 differing levels of response below, each with a more overt communication about your desires to be positive about your co-workers.

Respond Based on these 3 Variables:

- Your relationship with your boss and how open and honest you've been in the past
- Her willingness to receive constructive feedback, engage in self awareness
- Her perceived level of desire to respond to constructive feedback with new and improved actions.

If the relationship has been open and honest for years, she's been open to receiving feedback in the past and is always all about growth and being better then you could probably go right to option 3 that I'll outline in a minute. If, however, she tends to react defensively to feedback or contrary perspectives then you will probably want to stick to the more subtle approach of option 1.

And in all instances, of course, have the conversation privately and at a time that is good for both of you.

### **#3 Play it Like a Game**

The goal is to react without emotion. You don't want to lead with frustration. I often recommend "playing it like a game." Just decide that you want to see what you can make happen. Regardless of the level of response you choose, I recommend you come from a place of, I'm just lobbing this out there. If you are too attached to achieving a specific outcome after just one conversation you will probably bring some extra emotional oomph to the conversation. When you bring that oomph the person you are speaking with feels more pressure and is, thus, more likely to put up defenses. Defenses make it less likely that you will be heard.

## #4 Choose Your Response

Level One: Model the Behavior You'd like to See her Exhibit:

As she speaks negatively about the other people or departments you could have some phrases and examples ready.

You know what I really appreciate about the team in department X.....

I loved that So and So communicated this. I feel like it really moved the process forward.

You can acknowledge any valid challenges she brings up. And then describe them in a way that asserts that they are challenges not barriers. Emphasize that these challenges often arise in a newly forming committee or work group so are just a part of the process. Share your feeling that as everyone moves forward with the common goals in mind those challenges should fall away. Or offer suggestions for how to work through or around the challenges. Identify ways that you can assist in helping the teams work well together.

Level 2: Model a Positive Focus and Also State Your Strategy

Utilize the strategy above but in addition add share your goal of staying positive at work or of focusing on the positive in your work interactions. So, you're just sharing your own personal philosophies. Not making any recommendations for her. Just sharing how you think.

Level 3: Provide Constructive Feedback and a Recommendation

Have an assertive conversation and use the following model. Take her aside as a friend and confidant. Ask her permission to share some ideas from your perspective. When I coach leaders I often suggest that they just try the new perspective on for size. It's a smaller request

than listen to me and adopt all of my ideas now. And it feels less like you are telling someone what to do. You are just asking them to see things from a different perspective and then reach their own conclusions. Share how it feels when she bad mouth's other departments. You will pull elements from the strategies above, sharing your own personal philosophies and some of the positive things you see within the teams.

You might want to consider using the tried and true communication formula:

When You\_\_\_\_\_

I Feel\_\_\_\_\_

Can You Please\_\_\_\_\_

### **#5 View it as a Journey**

If her reaction to your initial conversation is not what you'd like, avoid frustration. That first conversation isn't the end point. You have embarked on a journey. You can continue to hold on to your vision of a more positive boss and plan to further your conversation over time. Commit to modeling your positive perspective. She might be one of those people who changes slowly over time or has to hear a different perspective multiple times. Just keep telling yourself, "let's see what the next interaction brings."