BONUS FOR READERS OF BREAKING FREE FROM TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Manipulation Behavior Checklist

Eleven tactics that manipulative bosses use, each with a few concrete questions. It helps you name what is happening, see whether it is a pattern, and decide what to do next.

Why a checklist?

Manipulation rarely announces itself. It shows up as a remark that stings for days, a promise that keeps moving, a conversation you leave apologizing for something you did not do. Each moment on its own is easy to explain away.

Seen together, they tell a different story. This checklist goes through your boss's behavior one tactic at a time, so that a vague unease becomes something you can name and describe.

The checklist on your workplace as a whole, *Is Your Workplace Toxic?*, looks at the system. This one looks at the person.

How to use it

1. **Think of the past three to six months,** not a single bad day.
2. **Tick the questions that apply.** Be honest in both directions: do not play things down, do not add what you only suspect.
3. **Write down one example per tactic:** what happened, when, and who was there.
4. **Look at the whole** on the last page. The pattern matters more than any single box.
5. **Talk to someone you trust** before you draw conclusions.

The eleven tactics

1. Gaslighting
2. Undermining your confidence
3. Micromanagement
4. Guilt, fear and obligation
5. The promise that never arrives
6. Playing on feelings
7. Language that steers
8. Turning people against each other
9. The scapegoat
10. Reversing the roles
11. Using rank

One ticked box proves little. Every boss has bad days, and every one of these behaviors can happen once without bad intent. What matters is whether the same tactic keeps coming back, and whether several of them appear together.

1 Gaslighting

- [ ] Does your boss deny or twist things that happened, so that you start to question your memory?
- [ ] Are your concerns regularly dismissed as oversensitivity or a misunderstanding?
- [ ] Do instructions you received later turn out to have been “your idea”?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

2 Undermining your confidence

- [ ] Does your boss belittle your achievements or ideas, especially in front of others?
- [ ] Is the criticism you receive vague, so that you never know what exactly to change?
- [ ] Has constant criticism made you doubt abilities you used to be sure of?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

3 Micromanagement

- [ ] Does your boss check every step of your work, far beyond what the task requires?
- [ ] Does the control stay the same, however well you perform?
- [ ] Are you held to rules on availability or reporting that others are not?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

4 Guilt, fear and obligation

- [ ] Does your boss bring up old mistakes whenever they want something from you?
- [ ] Are there vague hints about what might happen to your job, bonus or review?
- [ ] Are you made to feel that you owe your boss something, for example for a right that is presented as a favor?
- [ ] Do you feel guilty when you set a boundary or ask for something you are entitled to?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

5 The promise that never arrives

- [ ] Has your boss promised you a bright future, a promotion or a raise, without ever putting it in writing?
- [ ] When you ask for specifics or a date, is the answer always “not yet”?
- [ ] Have you taken on extra work in the expectation of a reward that has not come?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

6 Playing on feelings

- [ ] Does praise from your boss usually come just before a request?
- [ ] Does your boss share personal worries with you in a way that makes it hard to say no afterwards?
- [ ] Have you been given a flattering role, such as “pioneer” or “advocate”, that mainly carries risk?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

7 Language that steers

- [ ] Do conversations with your boss lead you to agree before you have had time to think?
- [ ] Does your boss use images, stories or metaphors where you would expect an argument?
- [ ] Has your mood been carefully prepared before a difficult conversation, for example with warm words or personal photos?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

8 Turning people against each other

- [ ] Does your boss pass on criticism through third persons instead of telling you directly?
- [ ] Does your boss share negative things about colleagues with you “in confidence”?
- [ ] Is it hard to trace criticism back to its source?
- [ ] Has trust between colleagues on your team declined since your boss arrived?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

9 The scapegoat

- [ ] When something goes wrong, does the blame land on the same few people again and again?
- [ ] Have you been put in front of a risky project without the authority that should go with it?
- [ ] Do you learn about your mistakes from others, in meetings you were not part of?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

10 Reversing the roles

- [ ] When you raise a problem, does your boss deny it and then attack your tone, timing or motives?
- [ ] Does your boss end up presenting themselves as the one who has been treated unfairly?
- [ ] Do you leave such conversations apologizing for having raised the issue?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

11 Using rank

- [ ] Are you pressured into deadlines or extra work with the message that refusal is not an option?
- [ ] Are decisions overridden without explanation?
- [ ] Are things you are entitled to by contract or law treated as your boss's to grant or withhold?

EXAMPLE: WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, WHO WAS THERE

Signs in you

The clearest signals sometimes come from your own body and behavior. Tick what you have noticed over the past months.

- [ ] A knot in your stomach on Sunday evening, or sleep that does not refresh you.
- [ ] Replaying conversations at night and rehearsing what you should have said.
- [ ] Preparing for meetings with your boss as if for an exam.
- [ ] Checking emails late in the evening, just to make sure nothing has happened.
- [ ] Avoiding your boss and weighing every word in your emails.
- [ ] No longer proposing ideas, because it has become risky.

None of these signs proves that your boss is toxic, because stress has many sources. But if several of them appear and they are clearly connected to one person, take them seriously. Your body often registers what your mind has learned to explain away.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Looking at the whole

How many tactics did you tick at least once? _____ of 11

WHICH ONES COME BACK MOST OFTEN?

DO SEVERAL OF THEM APPEAR TOGETHER, ONE PREPARING THE NEXT?

WHO COULD YOU SHOW THIS LIST TO?

A colleague you trust, a friend, a coach or therapist, a works council or employee representative. Their view may differ from yours. That is the point: someone outside the situation can confirm what you see, or show you what you have missed.

What to do next

Keep a record. If you found yourself writing examples down, continue in a structured way. The free *Incident Log* on the bonus page shows you how, with a filled-in example.

Understand the tactics. *Breaking Free from Toxic Leadership* describes each of the eleven tactics in detail, with real stories, and shows how to respond, when to speak up and when to leave.

When to get help. If your sleep, health or mood have changed for weeks, talk to your doctor. That is not an overreaction. It protects your health, and it creates a record that may matter later. If you ever feel that you cannot go on, contact a crisis line or emergency services in your country right away.

This checklist is a tool for reflection, not a diagnosis of a person and not legal or medical advice. It cannot tell you whether your boss acts on purpose. It can help you see what happens, and talk about it more clearly.

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