

## BOSS

In this section, we discuss responses to different gradations of the boss vignette. There were two gradations of the “boss” vignette. The first involved the “tone of the request, intended to be increasingly “pressuring”: 1) asking ; 2) asking “as a favor” to him(her) 3) demanding. The second involved the nature and content of the request: : 1) something not difficult to do; 2) something you find aversive; 3) something you feel is unethical . This 3x3 created nine possibilities from 1) “Your boss asks you to do something you don’t find difficult to do” to ; 9) Your boss demands that you do something you find unethical

### Series Four: Boss

<del>W</del> x asks not difficult task 0-1	<del>W</del> x asks favor not difficult 0-4	<del>W</del> xdemands not diff <sup>0</sup>
<del>W</del> x asks aversive 0-2; B-3; BR-6	<del>W</del> x favor--aversive 0-5	<del>W</del> xdemands--aversiv
<del>W</del> x asks unethical 0-3	<del>W</del> x favor--unethical 0-6	0
		<del>W</del> xdemands--unethic
		0

In the first part of this section, we begin by providing four examples from respondents (all women, ranging from 36 to 61). We provide their self-assessment on yielding and assertive (real and ideal), their definitions of the terms, and their responses across *gradients*: (ask, ask a favor, demand) and *tasks* (is not difficult, aversive, unethical). Part Two provides examples of the CODING OF THE MODES (appropriately assertive, appropriately yielding, negative assertive and negative yielding) across task and gradient (including 2.1 combination responses and 2.2 questions on coding. Part Three discusses Some thoughts on wise response(s) and future directions.

### **1 FOUR EXAMPLES: SELF-ASSESSMENT, GRADIENT, TASK, AND RESPONSES**

**EXAMPLE ONE..** Married female, 52, marriage family child counselor This person’s self assessment was a 3 on yielding (3) and wanted to be less (one); and a five on assertive and wanted to be more (6). Yielding was defined both in terms of positive yielding (quadrant two) and negative yielding (quadrant four): “Positively it means being sensitive to another’s desires, and enjoying sharing in what they want. Negatively it means submitting to something they don’t want. The definition of assertiveness contrasted it with quadrant three (negative assertive)

and quadrant four (negative yielding). “Stating one’s own needs in a manner contrasting to submissiveness or aggression. **This person was one of the few who defined assertive and yielding with nuance about the positive and negative aspects**

This person noted she had had assertiveness training and noted that “my assertiveness has increased, probably proportional to my professional and financial security.

Vignettes :

“ask”: Your boss asks you to do something...  
*you find particularly aversive.*

Response one: tell him I would be uncomfortable doing this. Find out how important it was to him for me to do it. Possibility I’d do it anyway (80%, saw it as appropriately assertive; (We’d say first part was +A, do it anyway seems +Y

Second response (do it anyway and steam inside) (20%); she saw it as overly yielding We agree.

*You consider unethical*

Response one: Refuse and give my reasons for finding it unethical (50% +A)

Response two: Discuss the ethics of each of us; try to find a compromise where I could do some of what s/he requests or a modification of it (50%); this person saw that as appropriately yielding. ( we saw first part +A: is having an open discussion about the ethics, the second part so some of what was requested could be +Y or –Y: JS comments: the compromise could be q2 or q4, it’s hard to know without seeing the specifics; I think it leans a little toward q4, but if the modification was within ethical bounds, then the whole action could be considered q1q2 (+A+Y): i.e., they had a conversation and made a modification in the request that the respondent could comfortably carry out.

“ask a favor”: Your boss asks you to do him/her a favor ..

NOTE: This person commented on “ask a favor” (vs just asking): . Asking a favor may be a manipulative attempt. My response would depend sometimes on the amount of trust I had for the person.

*you find particularly aversive.*

Response one: explain that it would be difficult for me to do that (+A) 95% (so a little more assertive than above when just “ask”; ask as favor didn’t add any pressure.

Response Two: explain you gotta be kidding. (5%) (+A)

*You consider unethical*

First response: would discuss it and beg off (90%). The person saw this as overly yielding. We saw it as positive assertive. JS Comments: The problem is interpreting “beg off.” I think to the respondent, this meant just begging not to do it, so groveling. You might have interpreted as simply refusing (which is the more accurate meaning of the phrase).

Second response: discuss and try for a modification that would be less unethical. (10%). The person also saw this as overly yielding. We see it as some positive assertive effort. JS comment: discuss” seems q1. But if the goal is only “less unethical” rather than “not unethical” then this reflects an element of q4.

**Demands: --Your boss demands**

*You do something you don't find difficult*

Response one. I would do it but respond verbally to the demanding tone (70%) +A

Response two: do it and say nothing about the demanding tone (30%) saw as -Y

*You find particularly aversive*

Response One : refuse unless it meant my job or would otherwise adversely affect my status permanently. (60%). She saw this +A; ) We saw the first statement (refuse) as assertive; but the word "refuse" (without any discussion) also seems a bit aggressive (-A). The second part we saw as yielding. Positive or negative? It is q2 if the person has made an informed choice weighing costs and benefits – it is not crossing an ethical line, it is just unpleasant.

Better response? Perhaps a better response would be rather than "refuse" to discuss what was aversive about it, and if there were ways it could be adjusted. (combining A+aand +Y)

Response two: do it, say nothing, and resent it a lot (40%) –Y

*You find unethical.*

Response one: refuse, with reasons given. 70%)(+A)

Response 2; refuse, but feel angry, upset and not share that (person saw that as -Y)

**EXAMPLE TWO:** Rehab nurse female 36 widow. Sees self as 4 on assertive and yielding and wants to stay the same on yielding, and to be slightly more assertive (5) She defines yielding as "I will occasionally do what others wish even if it isn't my first choice; and assertive "I'm not afraid to take a stand for things or thoughts I feel strongly about. She said she was a 1 (never or almost never) overly dependent, or overly passive; and a 7 (very!) accepting of others. She has practiced meditation for two years and taking an assertiveness training workshop.

**Vignettes**

**"ask":** Your boss asks you to do something...

*--you don't find particularly difficult*

Response one: I usually do it (75%)(+Y)

Response two: I might refuse if I'm not sure it has a purpose *or I feel it is a power play.* (25%, +A)

*--you find particularly aversive.*

Response 1: I generally ask the reason behind the request. If it is logical, I will do it; if not, I suggest she look elsewhere; (100%) +A

*--you find unethical*

Response Say no. (100%).She says this response is overly assertive (we'd say appropriately assertive)

**asks you to do him/her a favor ..**

*you find particularly aversive.*

Response 1: I usually explain that I have other work to do at present.(60%)

(She saw this as overly yielding).JS: I'd agree with her – it is q4, avoidant. It does not address the real issue which is the aversion; DS: this does not seem to me just q4 which would be to do it and feel helpless, passive; she is actually saying no, though it is not as direct as response 2 below( say no); this seems an interesting combination of passive/assertive.

Response 2: I could say no (40%) she saw this as overly assertive. JS comment: simply refusing to me is borderline q3 because it creates a conflict. DS, sees this as more q1 than q3.

Better response? Both DS and JS agree a better response to discuss why it feels aversive, why it feels uncomfortable to do, and see if there is room for negotiation. (a combination of +A and +Y.

*-you consider unethical*

Response 1: would not do it. 100% (+A)

**demands** that you do something ....

*--you don't find particularly difficult*

Response 1. This rarely if ever occurs. However I would probably do it.75% (+Y)

Response 2 No. (she saw this as overly assertive). (Note her concern about power play above)

*-- you find particularly aversive.*

Response 1. I would explain my aversion. If it can be relieved I may do it but not necessarily like it. 70%) (+A). We saw this as +A, then either +Y or -Y

Response 2: I could refuse 30% (she saw as -A)

*-you consider unethical*

Response 1. I would not do it, take responsibility for the refusal and look for employment elsewhere (100%) (+A)

**EXAMPLE 3.** A 61 female married social worker; wants to be less yielding (from 5 to 4); and more assertive (from 4 to 6). She defines yielding as giving in, going along; and assertive as asking for what you want without being aggressive. She saw herself as a 5 on 7 point scale of “easily manipulated;

**“ask”:** Your boss asks you to do something...

*You don't find difficulty to do*

Response 1 I would do it readily if it were something appropriate to my job. (+Y)

*you find particularly aversive.*

Response: I might say it was aversive and inquire why my boss asked this of me (+A)

*Unethical*

Response: I would refuse on the basis that it was unethical (+A)

**asks you to do him/her a favor .**

. (her responses were exactly the same as previous vignette.

**demands** that you do something

*you don't find difficulty to do*

Response: I'd probably be taken aback by his tone of voice and state that I was.; I would probably do it if he asks me in a different tone the next time (+ assertive)  
*you find particularly aversive.*

Response: again, I'd ask him why he is "demanding" and then ask why he is requesting me to do something aversive; Then if it was appropriate to my job, I would do it (She saw this as appropriately assertive JS comment I'd agree with respondent that it is q1 in that she challenges the "demand" and also shares her feeling of "aversion." If it is part of the job, doing it then seems like a +Y decision (depending on her feeling tone—accepting or passive helpless.

You feel is *Unehtical*

In all situations ask, ask favor, demand, re "unethcial) , her resposne was a "No, I wouldn't do it" and she saw that as appropriately assertive, and we agree.

EXAMPLE FOUR: A 36 year old female, nurse; She sees herself as a 5 on yielding and wants to be a 4; and as 3 on assertive, and wants to be a four.(so less yielding, more assertive. She defines yielding as "easy to get along with, usually go along with suggestions; give and take. For assertive, "forceful, pushy, come on strong. I do this with things I feel strongly about. (Note her definition sees assertive has an element of forceful, pushy (our Q3, negative yielding). With that view, one might hypothesize that acting assertively would be challenging for her. For example, she saw herself as a "2" as appropriately assertive without being tense; a 5 regarding Easily manipulated: 5'.. And was low (3) on overcontrolling and high (6) on accepting others.

**"ask":** Your boss asks you to do something...

*You don't find difficulty to do*

Response: do it happily. She commented: if I don't feel it difficult to do and have time to do it, I see no reason for it to be an assertive problem . (If it were difficult or not my job, then I **may** do it grudgingly. (**She anticipated our future questions!**)  
*you find particularly aversive.*

Response1: question why I have to do it. 75% (+A)

Response 2: not do it (25%) (-A)

Her comment: I'd question my boss, and if no good reason to do it, go to superior.

*Unehtical*

Response : not do it. (+A) (we agree)

Comment: I would be fired before knowingly doing something harmful to my patients or lose my license.

**"ask as a personal favor"**

( her responses were the same as just "ask" –see above)

**demands** that you do something ....

*You don't find difficulty to do*

Response one: make excuses, not do it (she saw this as +A) (90%)

Response two: "do it." (10% (-Y)

Comment: I do not like people to demand of me that I do anything.

**Better response?** We saw her first response as part of the "freedom reflex"-- "don't tell me what to do." Perhaps as a respondent above suggested, since the issue is not the task, but the

tone, to address that “demanding” tone makes her uncomfortable. Say I’ll do it if s/he asks in different way

*you find particularly aversive.*

Response 1 walk out (-A)

Response 2: if it were for a patient, I might reconsider and do it (+Y)

*Unehtical*

Not do it (+A)

## 2 CODING OF MODES

### APPROPRIATELY ASSERTIVE Q1

#### NOT DIFFICULT TASK

Ask for more challenges; (if job is too easy and I have time, I’d ask for more work!)

AVERSIVE: do it conditionally: if I have time, if it doesn’t interfere with other work. discuss alternatives with boss (compromise, negotiate); discuss my feeling with boss, Aversive: find out why important to boss; respectfully decline and explain why it is aversive. Suggest a better way; I would need valid reasons to do it State my feelings clearly. Politely say no. Ask for help. I wouldn’t do it-- get someone else to do it. I would object; I would decline to do it I would be polite but get my point across. Ask for explanation of task and why I must do it. Clarify my position and preference not to. Wise response: : Try to change his/her position; let him know I care about his/her position. Refuse, explain why, and say “I’m sorry”

. UNETHICAL refuse and report it (unethical); do it in a way that I retain my integrity; state my position clearly and refuse; propose modification that I’d be acceptable with.; don’t and earn dislike of boss; point out ethics and refuse; Offer an alternative, ethical way; Say rather not; Resigning or quitting job. Clarify my position and preference not to

### APPROPRIATELY YIELDING;

NOT DIFFICULTY TASK: Do it enthusiastically; comply;

AVERSIVE: do it if effected job status); do it out of loyalty;

Accept doing it as part of maintaining good relationship with boss (We agree, this can be +Y) for not difficult, even “aversive” but is q4 if unethical;

### NEGATIVE ASSERTIVE

Do not do it. (even if not difficult and boss “asks!”)

If Aversive (if asks as favor): (get angry); “screw off”; rebel; make excuses; quit; refuse and report; refuse and get angry resist openly, bitch; tell off boss; demand a “damn” good reason

#### DEMAND /AVERSIVE

Do it yourself JS: . Doesn’t indicate any dialogue, any exploration of aversiveness

#### DEMAND UNEETHICAL:

Tell him/her to go to hell.

### NEGATIVE YIELDING

AVERSIVE: pass the job on; do it grudgingly (aversive) JS: Both of these seem like q4 (one is an avoidant action, one is a negative yielding acceptance with resentment. Say nothing -Y (new behavior for me to speak up); Do it but be angry and feel helpless, too passive.

DEMANDING TONE: Do it reluctantly, and resent the demanding tone. complain, procrastinate, passive resistance ;Do it, give in.

Scared,

Fear failing

Resent boss: JS if this is just an interior feeling and not acted upon, I'd say -Y

UNETHICAL: Hopes s/he forgets it. Avoid issue.

Do it

I would do it if s/he agreed I would not be held responsible for outcome (some effort at +A) but still we code this as -Y

## 2.1 COMBINATION RESPONSES

Ask , not difficult: Discuss and comply (ask, not difficulty" JS: "Discuss" is q1, complying with something not difficult q2

Ask/aversive: explain why you were uncomfortable, research it, (+A) and within reason, comply with boss +Y;

say yes I'll do it (+Y) but let him know how I feel (+A);

Handle in a joking way with message being I can't do it JS: +A seems like the best fit, but it sounds like a pretty indirect communication. Is this a passive-aggressive response?

Demanding/ (not difficult, aversive):

Tell him I don't like the demand (Q!) but do it anyway (q2 for not difficult; perhaps for aversive; (q4) if unethical.

Unethical situation . Say no indirectly; try to get out of it'; JS:, these seem kind of q1/q4 – the person is not acquiescing, which would be q4; but they are being indirect and avoidant while refusing.

Protest then do it reluctantly JS: "protest" seems q1, "do it reluctantly" I'd code as q4 – giving in to the boss's superior power against one's own sense of right and wrong

Clarify my position +A) and do it anyway q2 if aversive, ; q4 if unethical

Explain I don't like it (+A) but do it if demanded (+Y) q2 for aversive,-Y for unethical.

Passive /aggressive (-A-Y).

AVERSIVE: Do it poorly ; Do part of request only

Apparently agree but passively procrastinate

UNETHICAL:

Clarify my position, my ethics (+a) and do it anyway (out of loyalty) -Y

## 2.2 QUESTIONS: ON CODING

Depends on how much I like the boss JS" This response might not be codable by quadrant. It really just says it depends. It suggests acquiescing or resisting based on likability of

boss. If say no when boss asks a not difficult task because you don't like boss, that would be – A); if say yes to unethical because you like the boss that would be -Y I don't know how to code.

Depends on how much I need the job?! JS This is another one that doesn't really answer. It implies that if respondent needs the job a lot, s/he'd do it, which I think could be Q2 or q4. Some refinements.

+Y for not difficult (asks, asks as favor); +Y for aversive, (ask, ask as favor) perhaps even for "demand"; -Y for unethical.

Aversive: Tell boss s/he's using you JS: probably q1, but depending on how communicated, could be q3

Report incident (q3 if aversive); q1 if unethical JS: Agree. However, it's hard to know about "aversive." If it is just personally aversive, like filing, then reporting seems like a big overreaction q3; However, if it's something most people would consider aversive, like cleaning up after an overflowed toilet, then maybe reporting would be q1

Demands/aversive:

Refuse and not do it. Q1q3? (see below);

Quit and report. q1q3? JS The term "aversive" could be interpreted in a lot of ways. Quitting and reporting could be an extreme response q3; but they could also be appropriate - working very late hours without compensatory pay. Aversion coupled with demand makes it more likely in my mind that quit and report could be q1. But it could also be a "freedom reflex" reaction to the "demand" and an overreaction.

Do it, complain and look for another job Seems doing it feels to respondent like –Y and the +A is complaining and looking for another job.

#### SOME THOUGHTS ON WISE RESPONSE(S) AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS.

In going through these responses, it can be seen that different individuals respond to the same vignette in different ways, sometimes wisely (positive assertive, positive yielding) and sometimes with negative assertive or negative yielding. So, there appears to be an interaction between "personality" on the assertive/yielding dimensions, and response to the situationally gradated vignettes. Also, some responses which are wise for one condition of a vignette: e.g., accept doing a not difficult or even aversive task as part of maintaining good relationship with one's boss (if asked kindly and as favor) may be seen as positive yielding, but as negative yielding if the task is unethical. Similarly, the same response: e.g., to not do it, we considered negative assertive for a not difficult task, but positive assertive for an unethical situation.

There are several responses in the examples which can be used to help create elements of an overall wise response. For example, one respondent said: Take time to think and consider how to respond. This seems a positive action of careful deliberation which, along with a few deep breaths, can help give the person time for personal reflection: on their own style, their relationship to the boss, the nature of the request, and their values.

In terms of process, in terms of a request (even for something not difficult) that is “demanding”, taking time to reflect can allow you to consider how you respond to “being ordered” to do something, and to explore your own “freedom reflex.” Then, from a calm, centered place, you can approach your boss about the process style, how it works best for you to be asked and requested to do certain tasks, that will create a more harmonious work environment.

Also, even for the aversive and unethical questions, the idea voiced by a respondent to try to understand the boss’ point of view, and let him/her know I care about him/her and his/her position. This will at least let the boss know you understand where they’re coming from. If the request is aversive, you can let the boss know you hear that challenges s/he must be facing; then try to share your opinion and see if you couldn’t work out some fair win win for both. If it’s unethical, you can then share in a humane way why this crosses an ethical boundary for you and why you need to respectfully refuse.

Future research can help continue to refine and explore these interactions between person, vignette, and response to advance the most positive sense of control possible in the work place.