

Bela
Rubinstein

The MONSTER whisperer

Turning Workplace Monsters into Wonderful Teammates



Бэла Рубинштейн

The Monster Whisperer: Turning Workplace Monsters into Wonderful Teammates

«Альпина Диджитал»

2024

Рубинштейн Б.

The Monster Whisperer: Turning Workplace Monsters into Wonderful Teammates / Б. Рубинштейн — «Альпина Диджитал», 2024

ISBN 978-5-00-206254-6

Statistics show that modern professionals spend roughly a third of their lives at work. It is where our ambitions and dreams live, where we seek acceptance and purpose, and where we strive for something greater. When conflicts arise at work, they spill over into everything else, we cannot eat, sleep, or enjoy time with our friends and family. In Bela Rubinstein's The Monster Whisperer you will discover a Communication Compass: your guide to transforming strained workplace relationships into productive partnerships. Drawing on personal experience and proven techniques, the author shows how changing the way you communicate can dramatically improve your professional life, reduce stress, and turn difficult workplace interactions into a source of inspiration and success.

ISBN 978-5-00-206254-6

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Bela Rubinstein
The Monster Whisperer

Originally published in Russian as «ЧУДОвищная команда: Как укрощать начальство, коллег и клиентов с помощью слов» (Moscow: Alpina PRO, 2024).



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Foreword by Nina Zvereva

The ancients used to say, “If you want to understand something, write a book about it.” Let me put my own spin on that: “If you want to be a good teacher, write a book!” Some might object: “There are dozens of outstanding coaches who simply retell what others have written.” There’s nothing wrong with that. We need skilled interpreters of modern skills and mindsets. Even so, a training session or seminar led by someone who has articulated and organized their own personal experience is always a special treat for the audience.

Bela Rubinstein has been writing this book for at least fifteen years. Ever since the day she stepped in front of an audience at her very first workshop and said, “Hello, everyone! Pleased to meet you. I’m Bela.”

Her wide-ranging and successful career in television journalism, glossy magazines, and the press office of a major city’s mayor has given her an extraordinary wealth of material. On top of that, she speaks fluent English, reads many outstanding business books in the original, and continuously studies through online courses offered by the world’s leading universities. She could have written an excellent textbook on public relations or public speaking. But Bela’s true strength proved to be her ability to spot the painful communication mistakes people make.

From the ground up, she created her own course at our school, Influence Without Pressure. In just five lessons (supplemented by mentor support and her own webinars), participants are amazed to discover that it is possible to live an entirely different life, free from fear and anxiety, once they learn to tame the “monsters” within themselves and around them. Which is entirely possible, since Bela has also developed a concrete, step-by-step plan for change through words and behavior.

The book is written with remarkable ease and verve. Yet its depth and structure are every bit the equal of the finest nonfiction literature on self-development and personal growth.

Our team has been using Bela Rubinstein’s methodology for a long time, and as a leader, I am delighted to see my colleagues’ smiles and to read their upbeat messages in our group chat.

We have tested Bela’s theory on ourselves and on hundreds of our students. And now this beautifully presented methodology is available to every reader of this book. I highly recommend it!

Nina Zvereva
executive coach to leaders of major corporations, state-owned enterprises, Forbes-listed entrepreneurs, governors, and members of parliament; member of the Russian Academy of Television; two-time recipient of the TEFI[1] Award.

“Monsters” Are Always Other People, Never Us!

[1] TEFI (Russian: ТЭФИ) – an annual award given in the Russian television industry, presented by the Russian Academy of Television.

Preface

"Are you sure the word 'monster' won't offend anyone?" my literary agent, Nastya Dyachenko, asked cautiously as we were discussing the manuscript of this book.

"Oh, come on, Nastya, of course not! None of the readers will take it personally. 'Monsters' are always other people, never us!"

"Well, if you're sure…"

"Oh, absolutely! Take me, for example. For fifteen years I ran editorial teams in television and magazines. All the time I was convinced I was the gold standard when it came to managing people. Then I was stunned to discover that two people on my team had suffered so much because of me that they later went to therapy just to find closure."

"Monsters" are always other people, never us!

I remember one summer when a friend of mine, a restaurateur, and I spent the entire season complaining to each other about our respective "monsters." She complained about a difficult client; I complained about an unbearable boss. An entire summer! Wasted! Complaining! In the end, I left a job where everything had suited me except my boss, while my friend walked away from a lucrative contract and ended up bedridden with a hypertensive crisis.

Now I know with complete certainty: the problem wasn't our "monsters." It was us. Instead of wasting an entire summer talking about things we couldn't change and weren't willing to accept, we should have been asking ourselves how we needed to change so that our "monsters" would turn into regular people we could actually work things out with.

And there's one more thing I know for sure now: finding the answer probably wouldn't have taken us more than a couple of weekends.

You've probably heard the statistic that the average person spends a third of their life at work. Work is where so many of our hopes and aspirations are invested: our ambitions and dreams, our need for recognition and acceptance, "dreaming of bigger things."

A conflict at work – and we can't eat, sleep, or interact normally with our friends and family. Success at work – and we become easygoing, kind, pleasant people whom everyone enjoys being around.

And if work is the be-all and end-all for us, then I believe it's worth investing the time and effort to break the spell our "monsters" have over us and build working relationships that bring us joy, make us feel supported, and give us room to grow and develop.

This book is my answer to the question of how to do exactly that.

As it happened, my very first job was at the synagogue in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, where I worked as an English interpreter for two rabbis from New York. It immersed me in a culture that was completely unfamiliar to me and introduced me to Kabbalah for the first time. One of the concepts in this ancient mystical tradition is tikkun, which means "repair" or "correction". It's about finding yourself stepping on the same rake over and over again and thinking, "Why does this keep happening to me?" When the better question is: "What lesson do I need to learn in order to move to the next level and take on new, more interesting challenges?" If every new job brings you face to face with yet another "monster," then that's your tikkun. No one can learn that lesson or pass that test for you. So think of this book as a study guide – something like Stress- Free SAT.

The greatest joy for any coach is hearing from people who have put the tools into practice and found that they changed their lives. Their messages are filled with the exhilaration of explorers who have finally discovered their own El Dorado.

I truly hope this book will help you on your own journey toward better relationships – with yourself, with the people around you, and with the world as a whole.

Happy reading!

Bela Rubinstein

Part 1. Heroes and Monsters

In his excellent book Your Brain at Work[2], David Rock makes a profoundly important point: stories are the brain's native language. Every other language the brain speaks – numbers, abstractions, theories – is a foreign one. But the language of stories is its mother tongue. It is the language our brains understand best, the one they think in most naturally. It is through the lens of stories that they make sense of the world.

To our brains, we are the center of the universe. And the world itself is a succession of challenges and trials we must overcome on the way to our ultimate goal.

In every story, the protagonist (that's us) encounters a monster (that's everyone else). The confrontation is inevitable, but the outcome depends entirely on the genre. In an epic, the hero triumphs over a host of monsters once thought invincible. In a tragedy, we mourn the hero's untimely death. I believe we get to choose the genre of the stories we tell ourselves about our lives and the people around us. So let's look at difficult relationships, seemingly unsolvable problems, and long-running conflicts through the lens of storytelling.

Change the story, and you change your life.

[2] Rock, David. Your Brain at Work: Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long. New York: HarperCollins, 2009.

01. “Now This Reminds Me of Another Time…”

A chapter in which you may recognize your own story or one very much like it

Story One: About Parallel Lines That Eventually Meet

Irina’s monster was named Herman I. He was fifty-three years old, and he had spent twenty-eight of them at the bank where Irina had started working just six months earlier. “A whole six months ago!” Herman I. would say, with an inflection that implied an eternity had already passed, yet Irina still had no idea where she had landed and probably never would.

The hostility between them began almost immediately. Irina was convinced that Herman I. had started it. What she couldn’t figure out was whether he had something against her personally or simply disliked people like her: young, cocky, and too big for their britches. He never initiated open conflict, but he never missed an opportunity to needle her with a carefully aimed jab. And whenever he had the chance to throw her under the bus, he took it gleefully. If he received important information before anyone else, for example, he saw no reason to pass it along to Irina. Then, when she found herself caught off guard during meetings because she lacked the latest updates, he acted as though he had nothing to do with it.

“Herman, why didn’t you tell me the latest statistics had already come in?” Irina would ask, barely containing her irritation.

“My dear Irina,” Herman would reply in a tone of exaggerated condescension, answering her question with one of his own, “if you don’t know something, mightn’t it be because you weren’t interested enough to find out?”

To make matters worse, it was astonishingly the dull and unremarkable Herman I. around whom the office’s entire informal social life revolved. Everyone came to him for advice or to hear one of his trademark stories that always began, “Now this reminds me of another time…” Nearly all of them involved senior management, whom Herman had known “since they were this tall.” Irina was quickly frozen out of that circle. The moment she appeared on the horizon, the easy conversation would die instantly, and everyone would drift back to their desks. Behind her back – at Herman I.’s prompting – people referred to her as “our little upstart,” implying that this was not a place where excessive initiative was appreciated.

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