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Handling Negative People

For the next few months, we're going to look at negativity and conflict in the workplace. Before we can look at how to deal with the conflict, we need to look at how negativity plays an important role in workplace conflict.

According to a study done by Randolph Harrison of Coopers and Lybrand, uncertainty is the #1 cause of workplace negativity. If employees don't know what's going on with the company, they tend to get critical and anxious. When a person becomes critical, his thoughts are normally shared with anyone who will listen. Once this cycle is started, more and more people tend to see the bad rather than the good and put down rather than build up, which will eventually have a negative impact on the organization's morale.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that companies lose approximately \$3 BILLION each year to the effects of negativity. If nothing is done about this issue companies will face a loss of production, employee turnover due to low morale, and rumors on the grapevine becoming destructive.

Companies today are facing more challenges than ever before. Fast paced changes in business, overload of work and responsibility, and no guarantees about the future all play a roll in employee morale.

There are four kinds of negativity that can cause difficulty with employees. Understanding each of these will help prepare you as you deal with them.

Circumstantial Negativity

This is negativity which is present oriented and temporary. It is normally due to an occurrence that impacted the person in a realistic negative way such as the death of a loved one, extended illness, or divorce.

Pervasive Negativity

This type of negativity is past oriented and permanent; normally with little or no specifics as to the cause. It is possibly because of one negative event many years ago. If this negativity exists, things will get worse if we don't watch out.

Deep Rooted Negativity

With this type of negativity, a person is overwhelmed by bad thoughts. She may feel that nothing works right, life stinks, and management is out to get her.

Roaming Negativity

This negativity starts somewhere else and follows you wherever you go. You may be upset because of something that happened at home or on your way to the office, but it stays with you, affecting your whole day.

*Perhaps once in a hundred years a person
may be ruined by excessive praise, but
surely once every minute someone dies
inside for lack of it.*

Cecil G. Osborne

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When a worker has a consistent negative attitude toward his job, the company runs the risk of having mistrust, little or no cooperation, increasing rumors, negativity spreading, and the unmet potential of workers.

Allowing negativity in the workplace to continue is not an option, but you must be wise as to when to pick your battles. There are times when you simply have to ignore some of the minor gripes. However, there may be a time when a confrontation must happen.

If you must confront a negative person, **always** be respectful. Approach the person the way you would want to be approached and ask to speak in private. List the negative behaviors in detail and don't rush. Allot enough time to have a thorough conversation about the situation. Most people are blind as to how their negativity is affecting others. Work together to find a solution. Once solutions are found, put it behind you and move on. If the person falters, we must remind her of the steps of action she's to take. The transformation will recreate her into someone who is kind.

It is also necessary to reinforce the positive behavior you want demonstrated. Most people love public praise, so give it often. At times, write a memo or email telling them you've noticed the changes being made and how much effort is being put forth to change. Focus on success and stay

upbeat. If there is a time when another distasteful behavior rises, zero in on it as quickly as possible. If you're diligent on giving the employee praise, any additional recommendations for change will be met with less resistance. On every issue, try to find the root of the attitude problems.

Always remember that negative behaviors grow if they are not confronted. We cannot change every person, but if we change ourselves it will impact others.

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