
The Mathis Group's

Messenger

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Overcoming Workplace Negativity

We have all had to interact with negative people. No matter what the circumstance, this person never has anything positive or constructive to say. Their negative attitude is normally verbalized and impacts those with whom they come in contact. They also have a tendency to see the bad rather than the good, criticize and put down rather than build up, and impact the organization's morale in a negative sense. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. companies lose about \$3 billion a year to the effects of negativity.

There are six main types of negativity that we are faced with in the workplace.

Circumstantial Negativity

Circumstantial negativity is present oriented, temporary, and normally due to an occurrence that impacted the person in a realistic negative way. Some examples would be the loss of a job, death of a loved one, extended illness, divorce, or a broken relationship. All of these are very real problems, but also ones that can be overcome with time.

Pervasive Negativity

Pervasive negativity is past oriented, permanent, and normally will have little or no specifics. It is possibly because of one negative event many years ago. The people who use this type of negativity think that things will get worse if we don't watch out. Their

philosophy is "If you experienced what I experienced you would think the same thing." They feel that their attitudes are justified, but no one understands.

Deep Rooted Negativity

This form of negativity may have no basis behind it—only thoughts. These people are overwhelmed by bad thoughts and think that nothing ever works right. They feel like everyone, especially management, is out to get them. It all boils down to them feeling that life stinks.

Roaming Negativity

This is negativity that starts somewhere else and follows you wherever you go. This may be a person just having a bad day. We've all been there. It seems like that day starts off on a bad foot, and we are never able to recover.

Hostility or Bitterness

A hostile or bitter person will use communication that puts the blame on everyone except themselves. This sometimes is demonstrated by playing the victim and acting powerless. They feel that nothing is ever their fault; it's all caused by someone else.

Unrestrained Hopelessness

If a person is hopeless, their communication will demonstrate that they are personally no good. They do not think that they can do anything correctly. Their self esteem is normally low.

*Attitude: It is our best friend
or our worst enemy.
John C. Maxwell
Leadership expert*

(continued on page 2 *Overcoming Workplace Negativity*)

The Mathis Group's Messenger

(continued from page 1 *Overcoming Workplace Negativity*)

Because of these negativity styles, the results will be mistrust, little or no cooperation with supervisors or co-workers, negativity spreading throughout the organization, increasing rumors, and unmet potential of workers. There are ways, however, to deal with negativity.



1. Ignore some of the minor grips. This may be the most effective strategy for dealing with a negative person. Some people are only negative because they have someone who will listen. If you start ignoring their negative comments they may stop all together, or at least they may find someone else who will listen.
2. Increase communication. If the negative person feels like they are in the loop, they may not have as much to complain about.
3. Brainstorm things that could make the culture more positive. Work with management to find ways to make the organization more positive for everyone. Try to find out the cause behind some of the negative attitudes, and fix the ones that you can.

If everything you try fails, it may be time to confront the person. This can be a difficult task if it is not done with tact and respect. Approach the person the way you would want to be approached if the tables were turned. Before the meeting, make a list of the negative behaviors in detail. Documentation is always effective because it will leave emotions and bias at the door. Speak to them in private. Never have a confrontation in front of peers. This can lead to a lot of embarrassment on both sides. Don't rush, allot enough time for the meeting. It is vital that everything gets put on the floor during this meeting. Don't solely allow enough time for what you have to say, but give the other person a chance to talk too. Let them give an explanation if one is necessary. There may be circumstances surrounding the individual of which you are not aware.

Some people are blind about how negative they are or how it affects others. We must help them find the solution that will work for them. When they falter, remind them how to overcome their negativity. The ending transformation will recreate them into someone who is kind and a pleasure to be and work around.

Reinforcing positive behavior is also a fantastic motivator for continued improvement. Give public praise for accomplishments. Document your praise in a memo that focuses on specifics. This will give the person something positive to look back on when negative feelings arise.

Remember, we cannot change every person, but if we change ourselves it will impact others.



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