



Dealing with difficult behaviors

The key to success for any organizational leader is having a team with the right combination of skills, talents and personalities. When the mix is right, new ideas flow, engagement and productivity are high and people work cooperatively. While the occasional conflict will arise due to miscommunication, unclear job responsibilities or differing working styles, the biggest threat to team morale and performance is having individuals with difficult behaviors. Left unresolved, one person can upset, demoralize, frustrate and obstruct the entire team.

Difficult workplace behaviors

While everyone is unique, there are certain negative behaviors that can have a detrimental impact on your entire team. Some of the most prevalent disruptive behaviors are displayed by certain personality types including:

- **The narcissist.** This individual has a need for admiration, carries a sense of entitlement, exhibits arrogance and grandiose behavior and has a general lack of empathy for others. In other words, it's all about them. They usually have an inflated opinion of themselves and their work and attempt to gain favour with no care of how their actions affect others. Narcissists are also extremely sensitive to criticism of any kind and liable to react badly.
- **The bully.** While there is legislation against overt workplace harassment and most organizations have definitive guidelines regarding bullying, it continues – just more insidiously. Workplace bullies denigrate, criticize, manipulate, intimidate or exclude. Like the narcissist, they push others down so they can rise to the top and are usually disliked, mistrusted and avoided by coworkers.
- **The passive-aggressive.** This employee says one thing and does another. They can be hard to spot because they appear to be cooperative, calm and pleasant. However, underneath they are angry and hostile and may deliberately undermine or sabotage coworkers or projects.

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- **The gossipier.** This individual may be a highly-effective member but seems to get gratification by talking behind people's backs and spreading rumors (true or untrue). They create insecurity, uncertainty and division in the team. However, they may feel gossiping is just a way to connect with others.
- **The victim.** This is an individual who constantly complains about their situation or problems. For example, they have more work than anyone else or are never treated fairly. They will play the victim when things go wrong by claiming they were left out or people didn't cooperate with them.
- **The finger pointer.** This is the person who is never to blame for any problem. They divert responsibility away from themselves and onto others when things go wrong and rarely acknowledge or apologize for their own mistakes, bad decisions, or poor performance. Also they can stretch the truth in order to convince others that their version of events is accurate.
- **The mule.** This employee rigidly follows procedures and keeps everyone on track. Mules can be beneficial to your team, however, they also stubbornly resist any change, making the introduction of new processes, personnel or products harder for everyone.
- **The volcano.** No one ever knows what to expect from this highly emotional individual who explodes when their needs are not being met. They tend to be attention seekers, dramatic and moody. When they're happy they can be entertaining and energetic but when they're not, everyone knows.

Managing difficult behaviors

It's important to deal with difficult behaviors as soon as possible before they begin undermining the efforts of the entire team and your effectiveness as a manager.

Different behaviors require different approaches but there are some actions you can take that can help with all personalities. They include:

- **Set the standard.** As a manager, you want to be perceived as fair and reasonable. Be an example of the behaviors you expect from your team. Set standards of behavior and hold people to them.
- **Focus on productivity.** No matter how frustrated or angry you may feel about an employee's behavior towards you or members of the team, remain calm and focus on the impact the employee's behavior is having on performance. Be positive and use "I" language. For example, "I understand how hard you work." Agree on specific expectations for future performance and behavior.
- **Listen.** In some cases, personal issues, workplace stress or health concerns may be at the root of problem behaviors. Just being heard and understood can change an employee's attitude. You can also show your support by suggesting the employee contact the company's Employee Assistance Program for help and information.

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- **Document.** Sometimes a quiet conversation between you and the employee can turn things around. However, be sure to write down the key points of the conversation, including agreed on changes. If problems persist or escalate, more formal or disciplinary actions may be required and you will need a paper trail.
- **Understand your organization's policy on workplace behavior.** You need to understand your responsibilities, expectations for your employees and when to involve your HR department. You also need to know what resources are available to both you and your team.

Managing difficult behaviors is never easy but it's central to creating a cohesive team and a great workplace culture.

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Multitasking managers: Setting the right example

Being a manager is a demanding job. Meeting organizational goals and resolving unexpected problems while juggling the demands of senior leaders and the needs of the team can mean bouncing from one activity to another and feeling like having achieved very little. Being an effective manager means working smarter – and inspiring your entire team to work smarter.

Setting the example

There are several techniques that may help you better manage your time. Try the following:

- **Apply the 80/20 principle.** The 80/20 principle states that approximately 80 percent of our results come from just 20 percent of our efforts. The key to better utilizing our time – and increasing our effectiveness – is to focus more on the 20 percent of our work that actually produce results. These are likely to be complex, demanding, time-consuming tasks, but they are what should be at the top of our daily to-do list.
- **Schedule meetings in blocks.** Meetings are usually interspersed throughout your day and invariably go over schedule – making it difficult for you to focus on that important 20 percent. If you are calling the meetings, schedule them in blocks so that one begins right after another. This also helps meetings to start and end on time.
- **Schedule specific times to return calls and emails each day.** Use your voicemail to say you will return calls at a certain time or by the end of the business day. This way you won't be constantly interrupted.
- **Schedule quiet time.** You need time to focus on those priority tasks that, as stated, are often complex and challenging. At the same time, you want to have an open door policy for your staff. Let your team know that when your door is closed, you're working on something that requires your full concentration and would appreciate not being interrupted, unless the matter is urgent. Also let people know that when your door is open, they are welcome to bring questions and concerns to you.
- **Delegate.** You'll have more time to concentrate on pressing matters if you delegate certain tasks. You'll also demonstrate that you value people's abilities and are ready to help them develop their skills.

Leading – not just managing

Great leaders are not only knowledgeable and capable – they're perceived as being fair and trustworthy. They set the standard for others to follow.

- **Be accountable.** Admit when you're wrong and be gracious when proved wrong. Also understand when other people make mistakes. Managers who are more concerned with what is right rather than being right are less likely to have team members who shift blame and hide their errors.

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- **Take time to communicate clearly.** You don't want your staff repeatedly asking for clarification or spending hours trying to figure out what you want. Spend a little extra time upfront conveying information and listening to any questions or concerns.
- **Involve staff.** Ask your team for ideas to streamline processes, improve resources and reduce workloads (attending lengthy meetings that do not involve your department). You'll get a better understanding of the challenges staff face while empowering them.
- **Resolve conflicts quickly and effectively.** Conflicts, disagreements and misunderstandings waste time and undermine productivity.

There are many talents, abilities and personality traits that make a great team leader but superior time management skills are perhaps one of the most important. A manager who is able to manage his or her own time – and the time of their teams – gets things done without placing unnecessary pressure on others. That means a more productive, engaged and happier team.

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