

## MANAGING DIFFICULT PEOPLE

On average, Team Leaders spend up to 25% of their time dealing with misunderstandings, personality conflicts and controversy.

Underpinning any major difficulty at work is usually a 'people issue' - whether it stems from stress, poor communication, low morale or underperformance. What makes it particularly challenging is when there is a 'difficult' team member involved.

There are many reasons why someone is difficult, and once they behave in this way it is hard to view them otherwise. However, people do not 'intend' to be difficult, and part of being an emotional intelligent and effective leader is to try to understand the reasons behind this, and ultimately work with it competently.

There are many explanations as to why some people are so difficult to deal with, but lets look at some work related ones.

- An excessive workload – Sometimes people just feel overwhelmed with all the work they are required to complete.
- Concerns about Management's ability to lead the company forward successfully, in this economy.
- Anxiety about the future, particularly ongoing work, income and retirement security.
- Lack of challenge in their work, with boredom intensifying existing frustrations.
- Insufficient recognition for the level of contribution and effort provided, and concerns that pay isn't commensurate with performance.

These examples underpin the need to invest in your team and their ability to work well together. But what if you are doing that - and still find that day after day a particular team member is really difficult to work with, and the whole team has had enough?

Try the following strategies:

1. Listen to them without being defensive. This won't be easy when you feel they need disciplining, but if your words are congruent with your voice and body language, they will feel you are genuine. Being focused on their point of view will help eradicate some of the hostility they may be feeling.
2. Understand their point of view and reflect it back to them. The emphasis being – you really 'get' what they are trying to say. By reflecting what you heard, you also acknowledge how closely you were listening.
3. Precisely explain your concerns, so they understand your viewpoint without feeling

blamed or minimised. The way to do this is to preface statements with **I** not **you**. E.g., I'd like to explain my perspective to you.

4. Take the time to problem solve together. If you take the time to be familiar with each other's view point you are more likely to have a workable resolution, rather than a rushed and misunderstood one.

You may also need to help the person take responsibility. Ultimately it is their duty to change their negative behaviour and attitude at work. Try addressing this one on one to show concern for their problem, and respect for their privacy.

Another technique to try is to substitute negative reactions with more appropriate ones. You may need to specify exactly what will help. E.g., telling them that the team aren't seeing their skills - they only hear the angry voice.

If you find the problem is getting worse it may be wise to call in another Manager, or even an external workplace consultant who specialises in communication and mentoring issues.

As a Manager engaging in the following will also help:

1. **Behave in a Predictable Manner**

To diminish tension, be very open and transparent in your dealings with and expectations of them. Announce your plan of action and stick to it.

2. **Put some focus on your own actions**

Any finger pointing will only exacerbate tension and blaming. Operate with integrity...'I'm going to hear you out before I speak...'

3. **Do not rehash the past**

Point scoring by reminding them of how they're always like this tends to create more negative reactions. Try to react with expectations of positive behaviour. For instance 'I'm sure that the team will deliver on time, now that you and I have talked...'

4. **Good things take time**

Expect the change to take a little time. After all, the negative way of functioning has probably been around for years. It might take more than two days for you to see changes for the better.

Comment on any positive changes you see – no matter how little. If you see an effort being made – acknowledge it.

5. **Follow Up**

So often a situation is left to 'sit' and fester. This won't work here. Be prepared to walk the walk and follow up when you say you will. If the situation is seriously affecting morale, you need to plan another meeting in 7 days time.

If you try all of the above, and there is still no noticeable difference in their behaviour or attitude, it may be time to engage HR and proceed with issuing verbal then written warnings.

And finally, people can only change themselves if they have the courage to see themselves as they really are, and ultimately believe they need to change. You cannot do it for them!

For more on this topic and some further ideas to address this issue - see the Workshop Outlines and Resources we provide, listed below.

**For the individuals exhibiting Difficult Behaviour at Work:**

**Workshops**

Emotional Intelligence

Attitude at Work

Communication Skills in the Workplace

**For the Managers leading 'Difficult' Team Members - Workshops**

Managing Difficult People at Work

Emotional Intelligence

Leadership and Communication

**Consultations**

Consulting Session (Groups of Managers/Leaders) dealing with specific individualised issues concerning 'Difficult' Team Members

Consulting Session (one on one) with Managers/Leaders targeting specific concerns regarding 'Difficult' Team Members

Please contact us if you would like information on any of the above

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