

How to Handle Negativity in the Workplace

By Julie Fuimano, Personal Development Expert & Success Coach



Challenge: I'm a new manager leading a team of sales professionals. One of my associates is very negative and does minimal work. While he meets quota, he could do so much more and his negativity impacts the other members of our team. He's been with our company for a number of years and it seems no one has done anything. How should I handle it?

Regardless of where you work there seems to be someone who is negative, enjoys gossiping or whose pessimistic view dampens the rest of the team. Creating chaos, causing difficulties between coworkers and starting debates in meetings are some of the behaviors exhibited by this Negative Nelly. Always providing an excuse, knowing just who to blame and taking any minor event and making it into a major catastrophe, this person manages to manipulate the situation to deflect attention from her. In summary, this person seems to be able to do or say whatever they want to the dismay of their coworkers.

Paying the Price

Managers often do not know how to handle this type of situation and therefore, the person seems to get away with the behavior; but this doesn't happen without a price. The entire organization suffers in both obvious and not so obvious ways.

Obvious ways can be disgruntled staff, staff turnover, complaints and a pervasive negative energy when dealing with this person or with the department where he or she works. The loss of even one employee can be very costly to your organization. And when your employees are distracted, their performance and their productivity suffer. When employees aren't working at their level of excellence, there's an opportunity cost for the organization. The time and energy spent thinking about and talking about this person's actions could be better spent performing their job duties.

Not so obvious impacts can occur in the form of customer dissatisfaction or lost revenue. This means, the impact on the company is difficult to measure from a lost customer. If the customer has a bad experience, not only do they take their business elsewhere, they harbor adverse feelings toward your company and tell others about their unpleasant experiences.

Permitting a difficult employee to negatively impact your organization, rather than dealing with their behavior, is costly to your organization. If not addressed, their behavior often continues until something happens that makes it impossible to ignore.

Tolerating the Behavior

First of all, the behavior is the issue not the person. The person is wonderful; the behavior is not. Confusing these two elements can cause managers and coworkers not to act. If you fear hurting the person's feelings, then you are addressing the person rather than the behavior.

Although the individual has performed well in the past or meets the requirements for their position, if their current work performance is not satisfactory, it needs to be addressed. While past performance often predicts future performance, it's not a guarantee. Deal with what's happening right now.

Taking Notice

This type of individual does not perform their drama without an attentive audience. In what way are you contributing to or permitting their negative behavior? By listening to the gossip, by permitting the negative interruptions in meetings and by allowing the poor treatment of customers, everyone on the team contributes to the success of a negative person. Yes, their success. If they are able to get away with the negativity, if they find a captive audience and take you away from doing what you need to do, then they are successful.

Negativity requires nourishment to develop and grow. Not acting against the negativity causes it to continue and to flourish. What are you doing – or not doing - to contribute to the negativity infecting those on your team?



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Coaching Tips: Raising the Bar

Each time this person attempts to draw you into the negativity, say no. If the person gossips, tell them that you don't want to hold a conversation about someone who is not present. If the person starts to whine or complain, say something like, "Now I know what you don't like. Could you tell me what you do like?" This will focus them on a discussion based on positives. Eventually, they will get the message that if they want to talk to you, it better be a worthwhile conversation or comment.

If there are set guidelines and expectations for productivity, then refer to those policies when speaking to or redirecting this person. When you focus their attention on your expectations for productivity, it shifts the energy of the relationship toward achieving their goals. Please know that this person may not know they are being negative. In addition, the individual may not recognize how their negativity affects others. When you point out the undesirable behavior in a nonjudgmental way, you allow this person to start looking at the impact of their behavior.

As you learn to stop tolerating this kind of behavior in your presence, you allow the other person to learn from your high standards. Or, they may find someone else to listen to them. If your entire team requires excellence from all its members, it will be difficult for this person to survive in the unit or department without changing their ways.

Want to learn more about this topic? Contact Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com to arrange a free coaching session. Julie Fuimano, RN, MBA, CSAC is named one of the TOP 100 THOUGHT LEADERS in personal leadership development. Your happiness and success is her business! As a certified coach, accomplished writer, and motivational speaker, Julie empowers your personal best teaching you simple, practical strategies for meeting your goals, communicating effectively, establishing personal boundaries, managing your emotions, and living happily. Coaching clients experience dramatic and profound results in their productivity, level of confidence, and relationships. She is the author of the life manual and confidence builder, The Journey Called YOU: A Roadmap to Self-Discovery and Acceptance. Visit www.NurturingYourSuccess.com to learn more about coaching or contact Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com to have her speak at your next meeting or conference.



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