



Managing Difficult People



YOU KNOW THE TYPE...

Ever feel like you have to walk on eggshells around certain staff members?

Know any hyper-critical, intolerant individuals who live for drama in the workplace?

Do you have to work with people who act more like opera-house divas than hard-working employees?

Of course you do.

The truth is, every organization has its share of difficult people. And while what makes an individual “difficult” varies from case to case, the effects of their abrasive behavior typically lead to:

- Lower group morale
- Increased internal conflict
- Diminished productivity
- Higher turnover

Managing difficult people is never easy. But left unaddressed, their challenging and disruptive behavior will continue. What’s the best way to neutralize toxic employees? Read this eBook to find out. In it, you’ll learn the most common types of difficult personalities, as well as strategies for managing them to keep morale and productivity high, while reducing turnover.



Toxic Employees Come in All Shapes and Sizes

THE STEAMROLLER

Steamrollers tend to be the bullies of the group. They constantly interrupt people, put down their co-workers' ideas and minimize other people's contributions.

THE SNIPER

Snipers can take out a co-worker with a single insult – typically during a meeting or group discussion. When someone calls them on their behavior, they deflect and say things like, “I was just kidding!”

THE PEOPLE PLEASER

People pleasers might not seem like “difficult” personalities, but when someone constantly says “yes” to more work and covering for others, they eventually collapse.



THE EINSTEIN

These people are knowledgeable and they know it. Einsteins are rigid in their views, rarely open themselves to other points of view, and can often come across as arrogant.

THE NEGATIVE NANCY

These employees complain that they want more work, and then they whine when you give it to them. They complain about the temperature of the office, the length of their breaks – even what they did over the weekend.

THE GHOST

Ghosts have a knack for disappearing whenever there is work to be done. They say things like, “I’d love to help with this project, but I’m just so swamped.” They may pass their work off to others or simply ignore deadlines.



No matter which of these personality types you're forced to work with, you must take the proverbial "bull by the horns" to minimize the negative impact they can cause.

Ready for the rodeo?

The following pages contain practical ideas for effectively managing each type of difficult employee.

MANAGING A STEAMROLLER

Dealing with Steamrollers can be stressful because they tend to be bullies. They want to rile you up, but you can help yourself remain calm by:

- Addressing the Steamroller by name.
- Maintaining eye contact.
- Keeping your voice even, low and calm.

To stop the steamroller, first let him vent a little of that steam (i.e., explain his issue without interrupting). Then, address him by name and say, "I've listened to your side of the story, now it is my turn to speak." If the Steamroller interrupts, remain calm and keep talking. Typically, as soon as he realizes he cannot run you over, he will change his tune.

When dealing with a Steamroller, remember:

- Discuss specific behaviors rather than their personality.
- If you observe bullying behavior, calmly and quietly interrupt the conversation and pull the bully into your office to address the issue. Don't let the situation escalate.
- Be assertive, yet calm.
- Do not let the conversation end without a plan for resolution.



MANAGING A SNIPER

Snipers make comments during group interactions that cut other people down and nitpick every idea on the table. The best approach is to deal with the situation head-on by saying, "Do you have something to share with the group?" Most of the time, when you put him on the spot, the Sniper will quiet down.

After a disruptive incident, schedule a one-on-one meeting with the employee, making sure to use specific details so that the focus remains on identifying and changing the behavior itself.

When dealing with a Sniper, remember:

- Address specific behaviors, not personality.
- Come into one-on-one meetings with specific dates, times and examples of those behaviors.
- Explore the factors that drive the behavior.
- Explain the ways in which those behaviors impact others.

If the Sniper doesn't seem to care about the ways he is impacting the team, he probably won't change. Work with him on a 90-day performance plan to give him an opportunity to adjust his behavior.



MANAGING A PEOPLE PLEASER

The People Pleaser is unique, because he genuinely wants to do a good job. He attempts to do everything that anyone asks, and he is often taken advantage of by other employees. Most of the time, a People Pleaser simply doesn't know his limitations, or worse, he ignores the signs that he's taken on too much.

Getting a People Pleaser over the hump can require a bit of micromanaging. Work with him on a task list, prioritizing those projects that are essential to his job description. Revisit the list each week, and forbid him from accepting any task not assigned by you.

When dealing with a People Pleaser, remember:

- Address specific instances where their quality of work has suffered, rather than addressing his personality.
- Build trust by establishing a real relationship with him.
- Express your concerns genuinely, with a focus on his success.
- Frame your concerns positively, and express the fact that you know his "can't say no" attitude comes from a good place.

When you keep a laser-focus on his core tasks, he will eventually learn that those are the most important. In time, he will develop the courage to turn down projects that will distract him from his goals.



MANAGING AN EINSTEIN

An Einstein is very smart and believes he is always right. He's rarely open to new ideas and tends to put others down.

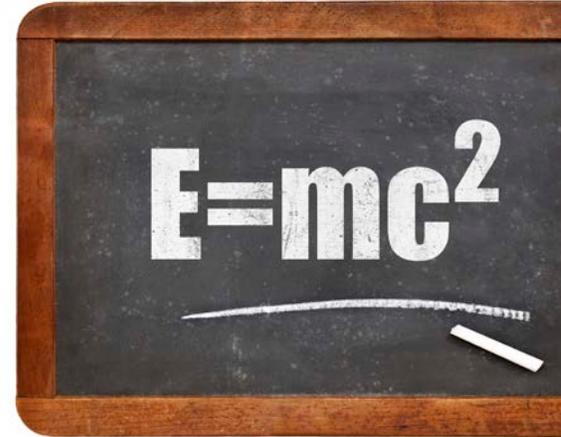
Bullying behavior is part of an Einstein's repertoire; he does not back down and rarely lets things go.

The best way to neutralize his toxic personality?

Don't tell him he's wrong. Instead say, "You make a great point, but have you considered this angle? What if this or this happens?" You want the Einstein to consider alternatives. He will likely make your good idea seem like it was his own, but if you get an Einstein to open up to other points of view, you've won the battle.

When dealing with an Einstein, remember:

- Address specific instances of behavior, not personality.
- Don't approach the conversation with a right-or-wrong attitude.
- Validate his contributions to the group and the knowledge that he brings to the table.
- Keep your focus on getting him to consider other approaches or opinions.



MANAGING A NEGATIVE NANCY

The weather is horrible. The printer is broken. There's too much to do.

For a Negative Nancy, life is one big problem after another. She doesn't care about solutions; she just wants someone to listen to her gripes.

Acknowledge her feelings, but redirect her focus toward overcoming challenges. Say, "I understand your dilemma with this. Let's brainstorm a way to solve it." Once you do that, you may find that the Negative Nancy suddenly has somewhere else to be. Though she may initially seem unable to resolve issues, a guided problem-solving session will often help.

When dealing with a Negative Nancy, remember:

- Focus on finding solutions to the problem she is complaining about.
- If she doesn't want to find solutions, she may not ever change.
- Once you've helped her with a problem once, encourage her to use the same tactic in the future.



MANAGING A GHOST

A Ghost is incredibly challenging, because he is never around when you need him.

Deal with him in an open, frank manner. Outline the specific behaviors you have observed and discuss their impact on the team. Then, address fit and alignment. If you can agree that there is a problem, a Ghost will usually self-select out and find a new position.

When dealing with a Ghost, remember:

- You may not ever be able to stop a Ghost from vanishing when things get busy
- A 90-day performance plan is a good way to encourage the Ghost to shape up or part ways with you amicably at the close of the period.
- Poor employee fit is almost always to blame.

Managing a Ghost can be a challenge, but it is important to stay focused on work quality and accountability. Establishing solid metrics and holding a Ghost's feet to the fire will either snap him back into the game, or lay the foundation for him to move on.





You Owe It to Your Team to Address Difficult Behavior

No matter what type of difficult person is derailing team success, one thing is certain:

If you do nothing to change toxic employees' behaviors, they will continue.

Call out difficult employees. Address their challenging behaviors. And give individuals the time, attention and resources to try and change their ways. In some cases, these people are taking out external problems on their co-workers. In other cases, it is a matter of personality – and their behaviors simply will not change, even with coaching and performance planning.

Remember, you are responsible for the success of your team. If someone is impeding that success, it's up to you to turn things around.



Change Begins with Hiring

Difficult employees have a real impact on the productivity and morale of the entire group. Over time, a negative work environment will diminish performance and increase turnover.

While it is important to learn how to effectively manage challenging employees, you must also prevent difficult people from infiltrating your workplace in the future. Your hiring process should include a means for assessing personality to ensure a strong fit. After all, the most skilled person in the world will not have a positive impact on the team if he undermines group productivity.

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