

## **The Leader: Dealing With Negative People**

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In several recent seminars dealing with principles of leadership, a frequently asked question surfaced: "How do you deal with a negative employee or associate?" This question was asked in very differing settings. The critical issue was common - "How can we deal most effectively with a confrontational or negative employee so that we can ultimately achieve the best results?"

This is an issue all leaders face. It seems to be a universal issue, but we see it magnified at times based on the temperament of the individuals involved. Most, though not all, leaders probably seek to minimize conflict and the effect of those that regularly express negative feelings.

There is the potential to move some forms of conflict to meaningful interaction and gain positive results. This is the ideal situation for a leader. We must also recognize that some people enjoy conflict. It creates a sense of satisfaction for them - they are controlling the climate. Obviously, if such action persists and it creates a negative work environment, the leader must become proactive in discovering ways to restore a positive work place.

We recognize that not all confrontational or negative people have the same motivation. Nor are there common causes. This requires a sensitivity on the part of the leader to discover and appropriately deal with the root issues. I like what Oliver Wendall Holmes, Sr. wrote in 1858: "Every person's feelings have a front door and a side door by which they may be entered." This implies that as we're dealing with highly emotional issues, we may not want to always approach the issue "frontally." We may have to come at the issue from a fresh perspective. Innovation in building relationships can be a tremendous asset for an effective leader.

The leader has to keep the goal in mind. We want to be as sensitive as possible to the "people issue," but ultimately it cannot stand in the way of productivity. To move a negative person to a point where they are making a positive contribution is worth considerable effort on the part of the leader.

## ***Leading Negative Employees***

### **#1 Be Realistic!**

We all recognize that there are going to be times when any employee can become negative, or be a complainer. Accept it as natural, but not necessarily acceptable behavior. Set realistic goals with those you work with.

### **#2 Expect Difficulty!**

There will be some consistently negative employees. We can target them for specific, proactive training. While you expect difficulty, it is not something we have to learn to live with constantly. Move people to the higher road!

### **#3 Fight For Productivity!**

We can let "negativism negatively affect our effectiveness." When confrontation and



complaining become the rule rather than the exception, we have to take the necessary action to preserve our productivity.

#### **#4 Defuse Negative Issues Quickly!**

The quicker we move to solve a "feeling" related issue, the faster we will return to normalcy. Our working environment should be pleasant, even fun, and issues that take away from that should be dealt with quickly.

#### **#5 Discover Root Causes!**

While leaders aren't expected to be psychologists, we can work to find the reasons for employees who are expressing negative feelings and are confrontational with their fellow employees. Discovering the reasons will help us deal with the issues more effectively.

#### **#6 Be Sensitive To Temperament!**

We know it's the nature of some people to be positive and generate enthusiasm wherever they go. It's also true that some people have a more "negative nature." Working with them to understand the impact that they are having can be helpful.

#### **#7 Watch For Negative Synergy!**

We're working to create a team spirit where one plus one equals more than two. When one plus one equals less than two, we have "negative synergy." This requires aggressive leadership and a renewed commitment to teamwork.

#### **#8 Take Time To Coach!**

Most people want to have a positive effect through their work effort. Coaching can be a helpful initiative to generate better results. Leaders take on the job of coaching with their assignment.

#### **#9 Don't Accept Compromise!**

Don't let negative forces, or negative people, win at the expense of their fellow employees or the organization. There are some things we have a right to insist upon - not necessarily being a cheerleader - but at least not tearing at the heart of the organization.

#### **#10 Act! Don't React!**

Be willing to take the initiative. Don't wait until the negative forces have done extensive damage. Leaders are responsible for "damage control." Action on our part might be essential to maintain a positive work environment.!