



Hughes-Consulting

“News You Can Use”

December 2008

Partnering with You to Achieve Results

Hughes-Consulting specializes in **Human Resources and Business Management Consulting.**

Hughes-Consulting is an approved – Incumbent Worker Training Program (IWTP) training provider and an approved consultant to LANO and MEPoL

Contact Us

hughesconsulting@bellsouth.net or call

Office: 985-893-2236



For past copies of “News You Can Use” please see our website www.hughes-consulting.org

Managing Personality Conflicts and Negative Attitudes in the Workplace

Greg Smith

They're here, there, everywhere. They upset managers and fellow employees--even themselves. Who are “they?” If you haven't already guessed, “they” are the negative employees most people encounter in the workforce at some point. If not carefully managed, they can suck the energy out of your business and your personal life.

What is a negative employee? They are people with poisonous attitudes and behavior patterns who negatively influence the people around them. Negative workers come in various shapes and sizes. Sometimes they spread rumors, gossip about coworkers, or bad mouth their superiors to their faces and behind their backs. Basically, they are unhappy people who resist the positive efforts of others.

Managers often hesitate to terminate them if they are productive or have special skills/experience. Sometimes managers do not understand the amount of stress a negative employee creates. It may be hard to accept a negative employee who did a good job did so at the expense of the productivity of others. Yet, ignoring or tolerating the problems and atmosphere they create can easily and quickly result in dissatisfaction among other employees.

What can a supervisor/manager do when faced with this unpleasant dilemma?

First, analyze the situation. How much does the person contribute to the overall success of the office/department/business? How much do they contribute to creating personality conflicts with other employees? How does that unhappiness translate into reduced productivity and enthusiasm? How much of your time as a manager are you using to control the situation? What are the legal ramifications (if any) of discharging the employee?

Second, plan a course of action. If you decide to try to salvage the employee, consider these tips:

Discuss the situation with the employee. They will probably profess ignorance of any problems, acknowledge the situation but blame the problems on others, or become defiant and try to play mind games with you. The employee may also voice his or her own complaints.

Evaluate the employee's position. Even a person with a negative attitude can have a legitimate complaint. Evaluate not only the employee's response to your remarks but whether the employee has legitimate concerns you need to consider. If the complaint is the basis of the person's negative attitude/behavior, resolving it should result in a more positive situation. Often, however, the complaint is either a smoke screen for the employee's behavior or has resulted from the person's own negativity.

Focus on a behavior you want changed, not an attitude. Accept the reality you may not be able to remake the person into an ideal employee, even if you are a great manager. However, you can specify an action or goal for the employee, and then follow through on the employee's progress. Once you see improvement, focus on another area. Always, of course, acknowledge the employee's efforts.

Use personality profiles and assessments. Many times, personality conflicts are the result of misunderstandings that build up over time. Each individual has a different personality style and frequently, different personality styles clash with others. A team building session can help co-

workers understand and appreciate each other in a new way. Packaged along with a personality profile or an individual behavior assessment, it can be a powerful tool in reducing conflict and improving communication between workers.

Consider assignments that will isolate the person from other employees and limit contact. Most work situations require cooperation and teamwork that make this technique unworkable, but it may be feasible in some cases. You may even encounter an employee who prefers isolation and is less negative when working alone. Unfortunately, negative employees often seek out fellow workers--either to complain about their job/boss/life in general, or to blame other employees as the source of their unhappiness.

Set a limit and stick with it. Managers have adopted the "three strikes and you're out" rule. Make the employee aware of the limits, tell them when they "strike" and remind them when they have only one "strike" left.

Third, terminate the employee. If all else fails and the negative employee ignores your warnings and refuses to cooperate, it is time to consider termination. Once you decide this is the proper course, take action. Otherwise, you risk losing the respect and confidence from your employees. Before termination, discuss the situation with a human resource professional and seek legal counsel accordingly.