

# Dealing with the Problem Employee

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## Reasons to address problem behavior

- ▶ Negative impact on productivity
  - High quality employees will become frustrated and lose confidence in your ability to manage
  - They may stop working at their highest levels and may even look for other jobs

## Distinguishing between an employee with a problem and a problem employee

## Reasons to address problem behavior

- ▶ Negative impact on customers/clientele
  - Customers/clients talk
  - A negative experience with one employee can be a disaster
  - Word will spread and your company may get a bad reputation

## Reasons to address problem behavior

- ▶ Negative impact on team morale
  - “One bad apple can spoil the whole bunch”
  - Other employees will come to dislike the negative work environment
  - Other employees will come to resent having to pick up the slack

## Reasons to address problem behavior

- ▶ Changing a problem employee is less expensive than recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement
  - A company’s most valuable resource is their employees
  - A “rehabilitated” employee can often become one of your better performers and an asset to the company

## Types of Problem Employees

- ▶ The Grumbler
- ▶ The Underperformer
- ▶ The Conflict Creator

## The Underperformer



### ▶ Characteristics

- Have the capability but not the desire to do a good job
- Tend to be slackers
- Do the bare minimum
- Go through the motions but never put any real effort into their work
- Tend not to respond to change unless forced to do so
- Punch the clock and do what is required but no more
- May spend long hours on meaningless activities (such as cleaning out the storage closet)

## The Grumbler



### ▶ Characteristics

- Generally negative
- Never smile
- Never laugh
- Always in a bad mood
- While competent in their jobs, they make negative comments about you, their coworkers, their customers, and the company
- Not open to new technology or new procedures
- Always shoot down new ideas and point out all the problems with new ideas
- See themselves as victims

## The Underperformer



### ▶ How to respond

- Respond immediately to complaints of someone slacking off
- Respond in private and with tact
- Offer training if the issue is the employee not having the skills or being fearful of change
- Be supportive and understanding but communicate clearly that the behavior will not be rewarded in the long run and could jeopardize their job

## The Grumbler



### ▶ How to respond

- Never let negativity take hold
- Respond quickly and privately
- Discussions should be private to reduce the impact on other employees

## The Conflict Creator



### ▶ Characteristics

- These people thrive on creating conflict
- Might be the result of a personality clash
- These employees cause anxiety, anger, intimidation, resentment, and morale problems
- They intensify problems, challenge decisions, are territorial, and engage in power plays
- If managers, they display favoritism, micromanage, yell, and talk down

## The Conflict Creator



- ▶ How to respond
- ▶ Try to turn these people around. Other employees will appreciate your efforts
- ▶ Try to find what motivates them
- ▶ Address the issue immediately and in private

## Insubordinate Employees



- ▶ How to deal with insubordination
  - Evaluate whether the order was clear and direct
  - Decide if the employee recognized that they were breaking a rule or policy
  - Evaluate whether the rule is the problem
  - Consider the employee's record

## Insubordinate Employees



- ▶ Definition of insubordination
  - "An unwillingness to submit to authority either through an active refusal to obey an order or through failure to carry one out."
  - Actively challenging or criticizing a supervisor's orders
  - Interfering with management
  - Showing open disrespect
  - Making threats, using coercion, physical violence
  - Using abusive language or malicious statements
  - Ignoring instructions

## Insubordinate Employees



- ▶ How to deal with insubordination
  - Inform the employee that they have violated a rule or engaged in conduct that is unacceptable
  - Explain that the improper conduct must stop
  - Identify the negative consequences of failure to change and the positive consequences of changing
  - Identify the reasons for the unacceptable behavior
  - Develop an action plan that you both agree on
  - Address problem behavior only; never allow personal feelings to come into play
  - Do not make idle threats; follow policies

## Insubordinate Employees



- ▶ Company policies on insubordination
  - Generally, employees cannot decide for themselves what instructions they will or will not obey
  - Your employee handbook or personnel manual should state that insubordination is against company policy and that violations will be addressed with disciplinary action up to and including termination
  - The policy should also state that if an employee has a complaint about management they should follow the employee grievance process

## Ten ways to help problem employees

- ▶ Take action
- ▶ Maintain privacy
- ▶ Identify the problem
- ▶ Describe expected standards of performance
- ▶ Determine the cause

## Ten ways to help problem employees

- ▶ Request solutions from the employee
- ▶ Offer solutions
- ▶ Agree on specific actions and a timeframe to implement
- ▶ Arrange follow-up meetings
- ▶ Document, document, document

## Progressive discipline policies

- ▶ Be familiar with your company's policy and procedure manual
- ▶ Utilize Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- ▶ Determining when termination is necessary
- ▶ Steps to avoid a lawsuit