

# Learning to accentuate positive

By Laurie DeLater Weeks  
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**Lois Wolfe-Morgan says negativity "is one of the most unrecognized . . . elements in the workplace today."**

"It's not my job."  
"That's stupid."  
"We never did it like this before."  
"It's not in the budget."

Everyone's heard those complaints, from co-workers, subordinates or bosses.

Such negativity, says Lois Wolfe-Morgan, a professional trainer, "is one of the most unrecognized and uncontrolled elements in the workplace today."

Bosses don't know how to deal with it. But by ignoring it, they embrace the behavior, Wolfe-Morgan says.

She leads seminars around the country on a variety of work-related "soft skills." But these days, employers and organizations seek her advice most often on managing negativity in the workplace.

Her one-day seminar on the topic is one of the most popular programs offered to the public through Wayne State University's management center, says director Rod Beaulieu.

"It's a time of dramatic change, and change isn't something management handles very well. All change is a threat to someone," Beaulieu says. "When someone becomes threatened, they become demoralized and unhappy, and they don't hang all that on the door handle when they come to work."

Wolfe-Morgan, who wrote a book about how choices shape lives, directed executive development at the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Command in Warren before leaving to establish Wolfe Associates in Brighton eight years ago.

"We can't remove all the negativity in the world," she says. "We need to manage it in ourselves first, then manage it in other people."

To manage negativity in the workplace, Wolfe-Morgan suggests, assess what motivates an employee, such as achievement, challenge or independence. Managers can then select work that best matches those needs.

Managers should challenge negative comments. A complainer's line should not automatically be accepted as truth. Request that the complainer write a plan for attacking a problem.

At a seminar at S. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor, Wolfe-Morgan told an audience of nurses, radiographers and clerks from area emergency rooms to think of starting off in life with a negative bucket and a positive bucket. If too many rocks accumulate in the negative bucket, you start to lean that way, she said.

Wolfe-Morgan told the group that she jumps out of bed when the alarm goes off and shouts, "Yes! I'm going to have a great day!"

## S TRATEGIES

- **Get motivated:** Assess what motivates you at work and ask co-workers or subordinates to do the same.
- **Be a role model:** If you're a manager and you have to deliver news you disagree with or don't understand, be honest but positive.
- **As the right questions:** Asking a sour person "how was your day?" will only unleash grumbling. Try "What was the best part of your day?" or "What was the most challenging part of your day?"
- **Limit self-pity:** Wolfe-Morgan packs an egg timer when she travels, and, if she has a bad day, sets it for three minutes to give herself a "pity party."

*For more information, call or write:*

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