

taking charge

tackling management matters



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The Bad Seed

By Frances Huffman

“They don’t pay me enough to work late.” “That’s not my department.”

“I hate my job.” “Isn’t it 5 o’clock yet?”

Your employees could be making such disparaging remarks behind your back while you blindly believe everyone in your company is as motivated and gung-ho as you are. Negativity in the workplace is running rampant in businesses throughout the nation. And if it goes unchecked, it can eventually affect a company’s bottom line.

“An organization that has a great deal of negativity associated with it will have low profits, low loyalty, high turnover, low trust and low respect,” says Lois Wolfe-Morgan, a professional speaker who often addresses how to manage negativity. “Negativity costs significant amounts of money, time and quality.” Has Mr. Sunshine turned into Bad News Bob? His negativity could dampen the spirits of your entire work force.

“Making the problem even worse, negativity is highly contagious, meaning one bad apple has the power to contaminate an entire work force. Many business owners have given up on the problem, assuming it’s just a normal part of life, but Wolfe-Morgan, who owns Wolfe Associates, a management consulting firm in Brighton, Michigan, says the detrimental mind-set is anything but normal. “It’s a

learned habit, and it’s easy to fall into,” she explains.

Negativity manifests itself in numerous ways: poor performance, negative comments, high absenteeism, low morale, antagonism, terrible customer service and more. Despite these obvious symptoms, negativity still goes unnoticed by many business owners. In fact, Wolfe-Morgan insists, “negativity is one of the most unrecognized and uncontrolled



problems in the workplace.”

To combat the effect of negativity, Wolfe-Morgan has devised a four-step formula: plan, prepare, practice and expect. There’s no way around it: You have to plan to deal with negativity in the workplace at one time or another. “This is one of the hardest steps,” says

Wolfe-Morgan. Entrepreneurs may think negativity will never hit their businesses. But whether you like it or not, the problem will probably sneak up on you at some point, so you need to learn the warning signs.

Next, *prepare* a program to change the negative mind-set that has invaded your company. When dealing with glum employees, try to find something positive they’ve done and focus on that. Encourage their good behavior and nip negativity in the bud. When you hear an employee hiss a snide remark, Wolfe-Morgan says you should confront the person and tell them to stop it. Explain that you won’t tolerate negativity in your company.

Once you’ve set an anti-negativity policy, it’s important to *practice* it. Realize that setbacks will occur, and accept that you won’t eradicate the problem completely. According to Wolfe-Morgan, 20 percent of the employees in any organization will be negative and 20 percent will be superstars, or positive forces. The remaining 60 percent can go either way. What you need to do is turn those top performers into your support system by spreading their enthusiasm and positive attitude throughout the ranks.

Finally, *expect* good results from your program and high performance from your employees. When negative employees drain enthusiasm from the ranks, look at their job performance and hold them accountable for their work.

Taking a realistic approach to the problem is the best way to keep negativity in check. Unfortunately, the dismal attitude rears its ugly head in almost every business, and yours is most likely not an exception. However, if you know how to manage negativity, you’ll minimize its detrimental repercussions.