How to deal with **negativity** in the workplace

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Some people ooze negativity … they can't help it. They dislike their job, or their workplace, they work for a horrible boss and are always treated unfairly. The patients are difficult, and the business will never go anywhere. Every workplace has had one at some point, and usually if oyu work alongside someone like that, the best way to handle is to avoid. Not always possible in small business.

On the other hand, sometimes normally positive people are negative, and sometimes, their reason can be legitimate. As an employee, you need to stay on top of negative sentiment and turn this around where possible.

Diagnosing the cause of the negativity

Knowing what people are negative about is the first step in solving the problem.

In my experience, when rumblings and negativity are beginning in your practice, talking with employees will help you understand the exact problems and the degree to which the problems are impacting your practice. You will want to identify the employee/employees who are experiencing the negativity, and the nature of the issues that sparked their unhappiness.

Perhaps you have made a decision that adversely affected your staff and weren't aware, or maybe conflict has arisen. Whatever the cause of the workplace negativity, you need to sort it out. Or like a seemingly dormant volcano, they will boil beneath the surface, and periodically bubble up and overflow to cause fresh damage.

If you working with a negative person, you can just limit the interaction you have with that person and avoid where possible. If you are managing a negative person, then a little more thought is required. Negativity is contagious, so if someone is constantly complaining, for the sake of your other employees, you need to sort out.

You can manage a negative employee – and sometimes, you can help the employee turn the negativity around. Your best approach is to not let the negatively get started in the first place, but if that is unavoidable, here are steps that you can take.

If the negativity is stemming from an individual, you can:

Don't become defensive. Don't take the negativity personally and as a general rule, it won't be directed at you. More than likely, for whatever reason, the employee, is unhappy with his or her life and this projects into the workplace. Ask the employee if something negative is happening in her personal life that is affecting his/her workplace success. You're not a therapist or counsellor but knowing lets you offer sympathy or support. They can see you're interested in them as a person. You need to ensure they understand their issues are affecting other people

Ask the employee what is causing his negativity at work. Listen to the complaint, to ensure the employee feels heard out and listened to. People repeat themselves because they don't feel as if you have really heard them. Make sure that you have actively listened. Once again, inform the employee about the negative impact her negativity is having on others in the workplace. Use specific examples that describe behaviours the employee can do something about.

If dealing with occasional negativity

Listen to the employee complaints until you are certain that they feel heard out and listened to. Ask questions. Clarify their statements. Make sure you have actively listened. If you believe the employee has legitimate reasons for their negativity, ask if they'd like your help to solve the problem. If they ask for help, provide advice or ideas for how the employee can address the reason for their negativity.

Sometimes, the employee just wants to complain to a friendly, listening ear; they don't want your advice or assistance to address the situation. Listen, but set limits so the employee does not overstay if not willing to get to the root cause of the issue. Long term complaining can sap the energy of those around them.

Tips for Overcoming Workplace Negativity with Enthusiasm

There's a cure for negativity! Enthusiasm and positive attitudes can spread just as quickly-improving performance and increasing productivity!

Replace Negative Self-Talk with Positive Self-Talk

Negative thoughts lead to self-doubt and failure. Look for negative messages in your own thinking or in the thinking and actions of others. Try turning the negatives into positives. Positive thinking will result in positive actions and results.

Build Relationships Based on Trust

Use positive attitudes and enthusiasm to build relationships. Negative attitudes make it difficult to trust others; and without trust you can't influence positive change. Taking action to build trust will increase comfort levels and strengthen relationships.

Win People to Your Way of Thinking

The only way to win an argument is to avoid it. When handled correctly, disagreements and debates are opportunities for positive change. When disagreements arise, show respect for the opinions of others, never tell someone they are wrong, and try to see things from the other point of view.

Disagree Agreeably

The key question that we all face is, "How do we disagree agreeably and still have our ideas heard?" Keep the lines of communication open by trying to see things from a different perspective. Take the time to really think about how the other person thinks and why they feel the way they do. ◆

Pam McKean is a Director of AB Dental Employment Agency. The company has been in operation for over 15 years. Over the last 10 years AB Dental has grown into one the country's leading recruitment agencies for the dental industry, servicing all sectors from government, corporate and private practice.

Currently, AB Dental services over 1,200 businesses with recruiting services including supply of temporary, contract and permanent employees. As professional recruiters, AB Dental can manage as much as little of the recruitment process as required, even if only providing advice.