Dealing with Toxic Employees

TIPS

Hire Right

Hiring the right people, with the right attitudes is mega important. Everyone presents their best self during an interview so you'll really need to pay attention to words, expressions and body language. When you're interviewing, have a second person sit in if possible. One of you can ask questions and the other can take notes and observe. Be sure to have at least two interviews and have a different person sit in for the second one. You will get a better sense of an applicant's personality when you meet them a second time because they will typically be more relaxed.

Listen for red flags. Comments like "I didn't get along with my boss" are obvious flags. Anyone who admits that in an interview is lacking self awareness. More subtle comments to watch for are statements like, "I don't feel supported enough", "I tried but", "I would have but." Any talk of blaming is a neon sign.

Get Perspective

It's easy to judge and criticize others for their behavior. Getting beneath the surface of an employee's behavior will help you gain perspective. And when you open your eyes to another person's point of view your understanding deepens. This isn't about going into counselor mode and trying to solve their problems. It's about broadening your vision in order to determine how to

approach the situation and to provide the appropriate resources your company has in terms of support.

Use Empathy when Appropriate

Everyone goes through rough patches and you need to allow time and space for that as life circumstances can feel overwhelming. Managers need to check in with their employees, listen, and show empathy when someone goes through a difficult time. It's easy to say leave your homelife at home, but it's not realistic and bottling everything in isn't healthy. Most people just need a bit of care and support. They need to know it's okay to have an off day or week and to be able to shed a tear when necessary. Listen, but don't feed the fire. Circling down the drain with them does not help.

Have a Tough Conversation, then Have it Again

Difficult conversations must happen and the sooner the better. Follow the steps in this article and be sure to decide on action and gain agreement. Make it clear the behavior needs to change. Seldom will a situation improve completely after one conversation, so you may as well prepare for round 2.

There's a critical question you'll need answered when you have this conversation - **Is the employee willing to change their behavior?** The answer determines how much time and energy you spend. They need to be spending more energy than you, and if they're not willing to do that, cut the ties quickly.

Don't Forget the Consequences

Often, I hear managers say, "I talked to them about it but nothing's changed." Without consequences, things will seldom change. The employee should have a clear picture of what will happen if they continue on the same path.

Allow Time for Adjustment

When you see an employee is willing to improve you must allow time for it to happen, particularly if the negativity is a habit. As long as you see progress and a real effort on their part, give them time to take the steps they need to learn new behaviors. The majority of the effort should be theirs, do your part but don't let their behavior consume your day. You have a responsibility to your team

Provide Feedback

As you see behaviors improving, provide positive feedback. Oppositely, provide constructive feedback when you see toxic behavior. Be really specific so the employee is clear on behavior and impact. Ask questions to help them verbalize how they would respond next time. A good question is, "How will you handle that differently?" [Here's an article](#) to help you provide effective feedback.

Role Mode

[Role model](#) professionalism. Don't bring up the subject with other employees. When team members come to you about an employee's behavior, hear them out, support them, thank them, and let them know you're aware and working through it.

Detailed Documentation

Document everything right from the start. Your conversations, your feedback, and specific actions and the impact to your team, customers and business. It's time consuming, however it can save so much time in the long run.

There are several reasons you want to document:

- **Transparency** - the employee is fully aware there is an issue and what your expectations are.
- **Clear communication** - when you have a written document there's no gray area. It eliminates wasted conversations about, "I said, I didn't say, I didn't understand." Have your employee review the notes and give them a copy.

- **Reference for future conversations** - when actions continue, you have a document to refer to and the next steps are clear. *We talked about X, you agreed to Y. This hasn't happened so now we're at Z.*
- **Documentation will be required should you need to terminate employment**.

Read the [full article](#) for more information and examples of documentation.

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