

# The **9 Traps to Avoid** When Managing Difficult Employees



A bad apple can spoil the entire barrel and the same goes for employees. If you have difficult employees you need these effective management tips.

Difficult employees cost more than we think.

- You lose morale. You lose the money spent recruiting, hiring, and training. You lose time. You lose customers.
- According to research, losing an employee can cost you between 16 percent and 213 percent of that employee's annual salary. The more they make, the higher the percentage.
- On the flip side of this, keeping an employee who isn't performing can lower team productivity by as much as 40 percent.

## 9. Believing It Will Get Better Without Intervention

Don't put off confronting difficult employees. [quotes]It doesn't get better. And the longer you wait, the harder it gets.

Each of us have a certain sense of ethics and see things through a different set of eyes. If someone is receiving no negative, natural consequences for their actions, this can feel like actions are being validated – or at least tolerated.

They may very well not know that what they are doing is negatively impacting customers, employees, or the business.

If these employees are not confronted in a professional way, they will rarely self-correct their behavior.

## 8. Initiating a Blame Game

There are now winners and losers when dealing with difficult employees: The objective is not to come out on top.

Don't assume you know why someone does what they do.

Approach the conversation with a professional level of compassion. Come in with the idea that you and the employee will be solving a problem together. Set this up as the foundation for your discussion.

If the employee begins blaming you or others, firmly redirect. Remind the employee that this isn't about blame or shame. It's about cause and effect and solving problems.

## 7. Making Assumptions

It's easy to assume that we know what someone is thinking or feeling. We know why we would do this, that, or the other.

But everyone's life experiences are different. We don't know what's going on in someone's head or how thought patterns control their lives.

## 6. Getting Too Personal

This is not about the person's character. Instead, it's about professional decisions this person is making or perhaps lack of a certain skill needed to do things differently. Effective management includes helping employees understand how those choices impact their careers with the company.

Focus on tangible actions and their impacts.

Getting personal is one of the quickest ways to trigger defensiveness. Once an employee becomes defensive, it can be difficult to have a constructive conversation.

Keeping things fact-based, rather than character-based, helps you achieve greater engagement.



## 5. Not Clearly Communicating What You Expect

Not knowing what a manager expects can be a very genuine cause of frustration.

Frustration leads to anger, which leads to blaming. Finally, these lead to lashing out – either directly toward you, or through more covert methods of stirring things up in the workplace.

Before you call the employee in to talk with you, write down what you expect to change. Don't dance around. Be clear about what the challenge is, why it's an issue and then clearly communicate what you expect instead.

## 4. Responding Without Observing

Workforce dynamics can be difficult to read. Jealousy, misunderstandings, prejudice, and other underlying factors can influence how employees perceive the actions of others.

Don't let your own bias or those of others cause you to react without assessing the situation.

The "difficult" employee may only seem that way based on the workplace as a whole.

Instead:

Respect the concern of the individual/individuals who brought something to your attention, but be impartial. Don't get tangled up in a "he-said-she-said" scenario. Observe the individual yourself. Then decide the appropriate course of action. Discuss this with the employee, if necessary.

## 3. Confusing Reasons for Excuses (and vice versa)

Stay calm. Actively listen.

A thin line exists between reasons and excuses. But if the employee is communicating real barriers to their ability to meet the expectations, consider how those barriers might be removed.

Effective management will often even channel this employee's energies toward identifying certain types of barriers and forming solutions. Be careful, however, not to fall into the trap of allowing your employee to make excuses. It's an excuse when an employee has the power to do something but uses a small hurdle as a reason not to do something the "right" way.

## 2. Not Scheduling a Follow-Up

The employee should know walking out of the meeting when you'll be discussing this again. But this isn't because you expect the employee to still be doing the destructive behavior. Rather, it's about checking in, seeing what progress has been made, re-assessing, and then moving on.

## 1. Not Having an Endgame

You and the employee should understand the endgame. If the employee doesn't correct the behavior, you should both know what happens next.

We know that you want to be reasonable and understanding. However, allowing a negative behavior to go on for too long can destroy morale, customer relationships, and cost you time and money.

Set clear timelines for correction. Communicate those timelines and follow-through.

We invest so much in employees, it can be hard to walk away, especially when you see so much potential. But understanding when it's time to cut your losses and let an employee go is as important as the hiring decision itself.

## **Effective Management Starts with You**

As an executive at your business, everything you do trickles down throughout the organization.

When you have effective management skills those who report directly to you recognize it and carry it throughout the organization. Set clear expectations with your management team about what effective management skills you expect from them. Give them the resources and tools they need to effectively lead within your organization. An executive coach can do that for you.