

Solutions

FAMILY SERVICES  EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NEWSLETTER

Issue 32

NEGATIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Sooner or later, everybody has a bad day at work. Computers fail, customers complain, the boss gets upset, your work has to be redone from scratch, and you're left feeling angry and frustrated. At times like this, it's understandable to be feeling a little negative about your workplace, and even your own abilities. Often it takes nothing more than a good night's sleep to put you back on track, and re-energize you for your next work day.

But what happens if the bad days start to outweigh the good? When negativity becomes a permanent fixture in the workplace, it can be downright poisonous to the company and its employees. It drains workers of their enthusiasm and creativity, distracts people from their work, and can even trickle down in negative attitudes and language when dealing with clients. Working in a negative environment is a stressful and unpleasant experience. Often the negativity is a symptom of greater problems that the average worker is unable to influence or control. But, even if you aren't the boss, there are several approaches you can take to minimize negativity and its effects on your work.

Am I Part of the Problem?

The biggest problem with working in a negative environment, or with negative people, is that negativity can be contagious. While you may not have started with a negative attitude, the bad vibes

may eventually seep into your work until you find yourself increasingly discouraged and unhappy. If you don't recognize and deal with your own negative feelings, you may find yourself mimicking the bad behaviors of others and contributing to your own and your co-worker's stress levels.

The most important step in dealing with workplace negativity is to recognize your own negative thoughts, and put yourself to work on improving them. One cause of negativity is feeling helpless about other people's behaviors and choices. Starting with yourself is one place you do have control.

Some important questions to ask yourself:

- Do I feel enjoyment and enthusiasm when I think about going to work?
- Do I feel "out-of-the-loop," or frustrated with workplace communication?
- Does my employer spend too much time talking about important values and policies, and not enough time doing them?
- Do I spend less time on new programs because I know they won't last?
- Does what I say or do make a difference?

Recognizing your own negativity is the first step to a happier and less stressful workplace.

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NEGATIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE *(continued)*

Changing Your Mind

Everyone has negative feelings. Everyone gets angry, scared, stressed out and frustrated from time to time. The important thing is how you react to negative situations and deal with negative emotions. Bottling things up or lashing out will only make the situation worse. Instead, try the following techniques for easing your own frustration at work:

- Know yourself well enough to recognize when you are becoming negative.
- Take a time out after dealing with stressful situations. Go for a short walk, relax in the break room, or even just close your eyes and take a few deep breaths before going back to work.
- Communicate with your manager and co-workers. Take the time to understand and be understood. Offer your ideas for improving issues related to your job, and remember to listen!
- Look for the positives in your job and your life. Spend a little time each day noting all the things that make you feel proud, happy and relaxed. You may even want to write them down in a special diary and re-read them when you are feeling low.
- Use your support system. If you need to “vent” or “get things off your chest”, tell them to a trusted friend or family member. Co-workers are not always the best choice for complaints. You may just end up adding to the negative environment at work.
- Treat yourself well. Don’t beat yourself up over mistakes, and try not to second-guess the decisions you make. No one is perfect, and being wrong is often the best way to learn how to succeed.

While you can control your own thoughts and actions, you are often not able to influence anyone else. Dealing with negative people can be a time-consuming and difficult task. Often they don’t even realize how their behaviour is affecting other people, and yet one negative person can bring down an entire team, by draining energy away from project goals and directing it into conflict, tensions, gossip and complaints.

Some suggestions for dealing with negative people:

- Remember that the problem is with the behaviour, not the person. Don’t be afraid to hurt someone’s feelings by commenting on actions that are making your work a negative experience. Remember a calm and objective comment about a specific behaviour will get better results than a personal attack.
- Don’t get pulled into gossip. Say you are uncomfortable talking about people who aren’t in the room, and don’t repeat what you hear. If you come across a troubling rumour, verify it at its source. Gossip only creates tension and ill will within the workplace.
- Listen to people’s concerns but don’t let them just complain. Try to direct the conversation to more positive topics by asking what they think would make the situation better, or what they are doing to find a solution. The complainer will either share their positive ideas, or realize they have nothing to say that you want to hear and move on.
- Give yourself permission to tune out or walk away. Sometimes it is impossible to avoid negative people, but that doesn’t mean you have to participate and absorb the bad vibes. Don’t be afraid to simply say no, excuse yourself, or ignore destructive and unhelpful behaviour.

Workplace negativity can quickly turn a great opportunity into the worst job you’ve ever had. But the opposite is also true. Keep a positive outlook, and it may just spread to those around you!

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