

BRIGHT GUIDES WORKPLACE FAILS

1. POOR WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR





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The Negative Person at Work

Some people seem to exude negativity. They moan about their jobs, about their work, about managers and bosses, who are always wrong, and they will always assure you that it's them who are being unfairly treated, and that the organisation they work for is going to the dogs.

We have all met them and every work place in every sector has people who behave poorly at work.

At its lowest levels it takes the form of persistent moaning, mild rudeness, and negativity towards work and daily tasks. At its worst it can be as challenging as direct aggression towards colleagues, carelessness with office equipment, willful damage and even office theft.

Without addressing the issue, negative behaviour can escalate and easily spread to other members of your team.

This Guide

In this guide we look at how to spot the early signs that your employees behaviour is on the slide, what the causes might be, and how some simple processes and assistance can address the problem and bring your employee team closer together and more efficient.

Based on the ongoing work of **Rebecca Stevens, Chartered Psychologist**, these Work Brighter Guides are designed to help business owners and managers address common issues and challenges in the workplace.

Although they contain useful tips and information, it's always advisable to talk to an expert to help you understand the deeper causes and plan the right strategy for your individual business situation.

Identifying Poor Workplace Behaviour

Poor behaviour at work usually begins when a person becomes actively **disengaged**. Instead of remaining neutral to the office culture or work environment, the person becomes openly negative about it.

They might **stop offering help to colleagues, discourage other employees** or begin to **willfully disregard their core roles**.

Negativity is often put down to the person being a bit “**moany**”. Other members of staff put up with it for a time, but, the negativity will likely increase if it’s not dealt with.

What to Look Out For

Negative comments are very normal. An employee who is actively disengaged will comment openly and complain about:

- **Job Tasks** – no matter what they are given to do, they will find a negative way to express it.
- **Colleagues** – typically singling out certain members of the team as “enemies”.
- **Customers** – complaining about them as soon as they are out of ear-shot; or even being openly rude to them in communications.
- **Managers** – the most common complaint. Managers and senior Employees are held responsible for everything that’s wrong with their situation – “it’s all their fault”.
- **The Organisation** – constant complaints about “working here” and the way the organisation is run.

In some organisations, such as the emergency services, there are very common instances of individuals openly stating that they like their manager, their colleagues and the people they help in the job, but that they are sick of “*this place*” as an organisation. Their real complaint is with the senior leadership and the direction the leadership is advocating.

In this circumstance, an individual will “*stay for the local things*”, but will become increasingly miserable and disengaged with themselves and with their immediate colleagues and superiors.

The Causes of Bad Workplace Behaviour

There are many reasons why a person might start to behave in a negative way at work. But bad behaviour often has a clinical cause.

Depression, psychological issues and **health problems** can typically lead to active disengagement and poor attitudes at work.

On closer investigation, you may find that the employee is not doing well in themselves. If this is the case, there isn't much you can do other than give appropriate support and guide them towards **professional help**. However, all is not lost – there are still many things you can influence.

Other causes of bad behaviour could be due to:-

- Personality clashes and people having different motives and values
- Communication constraints; with poor communication methods
- Simple communication misunderstandings
- Not knowing how to do a task but not wanting to ask

Promoting better understanding of each other's personality, motives and values, better team communication and skills training can alleviate many of these issues negative issues.

How to Deal with Bad Behaviour

Inaction is not an option. Ignoring bad office behaviour will have a destructive effect on employee morale. Negativity easily spreads. Team members and colleagues will quickly begin to resent having to work closely with a person who is displaying poor behaviour.

Left unchecked, the individual themselves may well escalate their negative actions. This can lead to:

- **A complete lack of positive behaviour** – not engaging in tasks, forgetting to pass on messages etc.
- **Passive aggressive negativity** – undermining colleagues and becoming increasingly rude.
- **Reactive negativity** – difficulty in staying calm, e.g. shouting at customers or colleagues.
- **Willful destruction** – damaging company data or property, leaving and poaching team members, encouraging others to leave

Act Quickly!

The good thing is that poor office behaviour stands out! Even passive aggressive behaviour is easy to spot. This means that you can quickly pick up on what's happening and manage the situation early

Here are 5 simple steps: -

1. Reward Right Behaviours

With a negative attitude, it is important to reinforce the positives and good behaviours they do show. This is known as behavioural reinforcement. Most people call this the "carrot and the stick" but research has shown that using just the carrot has a much stronger influence on long-term behavioural change than using both or just using the stick.

Human beings are not one dimensional. Even a person who is exhibiting negative behaviour on a regular basis will also occasionally exhibit positive behaviours. When they do the right thing, reward them for it.

If they are usually moany, reward them when they are positive. The trick is to catch them doing something good – however small, and build up from there.

Rewards don't have to be tangible, but simple, vocal support for a good behaviour can have an extremely positive effect. A thank you in person and a short explanation of why someone's action helped specifically.

Be authentic, be evidence based and show the link between behaviour and impact; and do it straight away! Don't leave it to the monthly meeting or annual review.

2. Actions Have Consequences

While the stick is less effective, it is important to be clear about boundaries. Be clear about the consequence of negative behaviours.

Where there is an instance of stealing, office damage, or bullying, it is important to be clear about what is acceptable and what the consequences will be.

To do this, it is vital to have the right policies and frameworks in place to support any disciplinary proceedings. This way, highlighting bad behaviour cannot be dismissed by the perpetrator as just a personal attack. Be careful on how you use this though. It is more effective for your employees to reach their own conclusions about where they may have gone wrong rather than you are spelling it out for them.

Job descriptions should contain reference to required behaviours and other documents such as value frameworks, competency frameworks and customer charters, need to be in place, to establish what relationships and good behaviour should look like in the work environment.

3. Be the Role Model

For some people it is not always obvious what good behaviour should look like. Therefore, you have to role model the desired behaviour as a leader.

To this end, it is vital that managers and business owners reflect the behaviour they want to promote amongst employees. If you want employees to be smart when they meet clients, be smart. If you want them to be polite, to people, then be polite as well. Your behaviour should reflect your standards. Be the role model for your employees.

As such, it can be useful to ask for feedback from your employees; this could be a 360 feedback tool – or as simple as a regular one-to-one ask of employees: "In your view, what should I stop doing, start doing and continue doing?"

5 Simple Steps

1. Reward right behaviours
2. Actions have consequences
3. Be the role model
4. Reinforce employee value
5. Develop your team

In our experience, people problems stem from the top. As a business owner, your behaviour is more obvious than you may think and your approach will filter down the organisation and be part of the culture. Any good business leader starts by looking at themselves first, before seeking to change their employees.

4. Reinforce Employee Value

One cause of bad office behaviour is a perception by an individual that they have consistently been overlooked for promotion and that they are undervalued as an employee of the organisation. It is common for the best employees to receive very little time from their managers (as the bad ones are using it all up!). It is also very common for long-term employees to end up a little ignored in terms of reward and development.

Make sure you track your contact with your employees in the same way you would track your contact with your customers. Seek to nurture them; as it's much easier to grow talent than hire talent. Seek to know what motivates each of your employees – as that varies a lot.

You can use more formal rewards systems, such as perkbox.com, but these are not the complete answer in themselves. Rewards have to be multifaceted and should be aimed at meeting individual's needs. This might include social support, social cohesion, or some form of learning development. Such as offering new employees choices on their office chair, laptop type, etc. By offering a reward based on need, you are reinforcing employee value. Giving status, respect and comfort to an individual makes them feel more connected to you and the organisation.

5. Develop your Team

Supporting and developing your team can greatly improve morale and diminish bad behaviours. It is important to regularly ask what development your team might need.

- Do they have the right skills and knowledge to do the job they are doing?
- Do they know how they fit into the team and what others are doing?
- Do they get any feedback about how they are performing and what to develop?
- Do your managers and leaders need training and/or coaching to help them know how to manage people?

If individuals are disengaged with colleagues, there needs to be an active process for bringing them together. This should be more than the classic “team building event” or an alcohol fueled night out! As enjoyable as they are at the time, the research shows they don't have lasting effects unless part of a longer-term development plan.

Every employee should have a development plan, focused 80% on fulfilling their potential and 20% on addressing weaker areas. This development needs to have responsibilities, actions, support required, deadlines and indicators for when they are complete. It needs to be regularly reviewed. It needs to be owned by the employee and a useful, valuable part of their employment with you.

For certain teams in your organisation you may choose to bring this together into a programme, so they are more cohesive and effective in their delivery e.g. a leadership development programme aims to improve self-understanding, peer understanding and improve the capability of the leadership team.

Work with a Professional

Every employee team will contain a range of personalities. Sometimes these personalities work well together, sometimes there are clashes. In all cases, deepening an understanding of each other helps and creates a better environment where mutual respect and improved collaboration can blossom.

Poor office behaviour, in all its many forms, can be difficult to deal with for managers and small business owners, which is where a dedicated solution designed to meet your needs, led by a professional, can have far reaching positive effects. Not only on office attitudes, but also on company efficiency.

What if your under-confident employee found a new level of confidence and initiative so they could really step up in the way you need them to? What if your star performer could shine even brighter by focusing and stretching their strengths; freeing more of your time up from the business operations? What if you could be more sure your next hiring decision was a good one?

If you believe that your employees are exhibiting any of the signs of poor office behaviour and you've run out of ideas, get in touch with Work Brighter who will offer you a deeper psychological insight and help you find the right solution for you.

For more information contact Rebecca Stevens at Work Brighter.

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