

# Dealing with difficult employees

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All managers will have to deal with difficult employees during their careers. First, there will always be difficult employees. Second, it's your job as the manager to deal with them. If you don't deal with the problem, it will only get worse.

Why are difficult employees like that?

Difficult employees are that way simply because it is a behaviour that has worked for them in the past. They may not know any other behaviour or they may choose this behaviour when they think it will be most effective. You will be successful in dealing with difficult employees only to the extent that you can make these undesirable behaviours no longer effective for them. In many ways, it's like dealing with children. If every time a child screams, its parents give it candy, what will the child do when it wants candy? It will scream, of course.

The same is true for the employee who "blows up" whenever anyone disagrees with him. When he does that people stop disagreeing with him and he thinks he has won.

How can a manager deal with difficult employees

## Evaluate

It is important when dealing with difficult employees to act quickly. Often you will need to act almost immediately to neutralize a danger-

ous situation. However, it is always appropriate to think before you act. Clearly if an employee comes to work with a gun, you will need to act more quickly than when someone complains that another employee is always taking credit for her work. In either case, take the appropriate amount of time to evaluate the situation before you act. You don't want to make it worse.

Recognize that most employees can be "difficult" from time to time. This can be caused by stress on the job or away from it. Some employees are difficult more often than others. It is not always your least-productive employees who are difficult. So take a moment to evaluate each situation for the unique situation it is.

Do your homework

Always act on facts. Don't base your actions on gossip or rumour. The person spreading the gossip is a difficult employee in their own way. If you have not seen the inappropriate behaviour yourself, look into it. Ask the people reportedly involved. Collect all the facts you can before you act.

Don't use the fact that you haven't seen the inappropriate behaviour as an excuse to delay doing something. It is important to act promptly. Make sure you aren't part of the problem. It will be much more difficult to remain calm and impartial in confronting the difficult behaviour if you are partly responsible. If that's the case,



be sure you acknowledge your role in it, at least to yourself.

Develop a plan

You're a manager. You know the value of planning. This situation is no different. You need to plan the timing of the confrontation. You need to select a quiet, private place where you won't be interrupted. You need to decide whether you need to have others, like an HR representative, present in the meeting. Plan the confrontation and then make it happen. When you have prepared, it is time to act. You do not need to act impulsively, but you must act quickly. The longer an inappropriate behaviour is allowed to continue, the harder it will be to change it or stop it.

Confront the problem

Don't put it off. It may not be pleas-

ant, but it's an important part of your job. It will not "fix itself". It can only get worse. You have planned this confrontation. Now you need to execute. Deal with the behaviour, not the person.

Your goal is to develop a solution, not to "win". Focus on the inappropriate behaviour; don't attack the person. Use "I" statements like "I need everybody on the team here on time so we can meet our goals" rather than "you" statements like "you are always late". Don't assume the inappropriate behaviour is caused by negative intent. It may be from fear, confusion, lack of motivation, personal problems, etc. Give the other person a chance to develop a solution to the problem. They are more likely to "own" the solution if they are at least partially responsible for developing it.

Try to draw out the reasons behind the behaviour

As you talk with the difficult employee, actively listen to what they say. Stay calm and stay positive, but remain impartial and non-judgmental. Ask leading questions that can't be answered in one or two words. Don't interrupt.

When you do respond to the difficult employee, remain calm. Summarize back to them what they just said, "so what I understand you are saying is", so they know you are actually listening to them.

If you can find out from the difficult employee what the real source of the inappropriate behaviour is, you have a much better chance of finding a solution. Sometimes these confrontations will go smoothly, or at least rapidly, to a conclusion. Other times it will require several sessions to resolve the problem.

Repeat as necessary

Minor problems, like being late for work, you may be able to resolve with a simple chat in your office with the employee. An office bully, who has used that behaviour successfully since elementary school, may need more than one confrontation before a solution can be reached. Be patient. Don't always expect instant results. Aim for continuous improvement rather than trying to achieve instant success.

Know when you are in over your

head

Sometimes the underlying issue with a difficult employee will be beyond your capabilities. The employee may have psychological problems that require professional help, for example.

Learn when to keep trying and when to refer the employee to others for more specialized help. Your company may have an EAP or you may need to use resources from the community.

Know when you are at the end

While the goal is always to reach a mutually acceptable solution that resolves the difficult employee's inappropriate behaviour and keeps your team at full strength, sometimes that is not possible. When you reach an impasse and the employee is not willing to change his or her behaviour then you need to begin termination procedures in accordance with your company's policies.

Coming to a Solution

The desired result from confronting a difficult employee's inappropriate behaviour is an agreed upon solution. You know that this inappropriate behaviour will continue unless you and the employee agree on a solution. The employee needs to know what is inappropriate about their behaviour and they also need to know what is appropriate behaviour. The need for a manager to communicate clearly is always high. It is especially important in these situations.

## The Culture Audit: Building the Successful Company Culture

A company's culture can help ensure the success of its business objectives. However, company culture is about more than having free Coca Cola in the fridge and allowing employees to take their dogs to the office. Culture is how employees describe where they work, understand the business, and see

themselves as part of the organization. Building a strong company culture will not itself guarantee business success, but culture is a key determinant in attracting talent—and it is that talent that carry a company forward.

A "culture audit" can help assess the culture that

currently exists in a company. It also offers insights into the means to strengthen it. This process is more commonly referred to as an "employee survey," - it helps companies learn what *raison d'être* keeps employees at the company.

An effective corporate culture audit describes the

overall working environment, identifies the unwritten "norms" and rules governing employee interactions and workplace practices, determines possible barriers to effective work practices and communication, and makes recommendations for addressing identified problems. Not only will it help retain top performers, it provides a blueprint of what attributes to look for in applicants.

Sample questions might be:

- Are you being compensated fairly?
- Are your benefits comparable to those of the company's competitors?
- Does the company value your work?
- Are you getting the training you need?
- Does open communication exist in the company?
- Do you feel challenged?
- Do your values match those of the company?

You might notice that a culture audit asks questions typically asked during an exit interview! Why wait to ask these important questions after the company has

already lost its investment in an employee. Audits uncover potential friction points as well as sources of synergy, and generate possibilities for internal process improvements within the organization. By uncovering trouble spots in advance, the audit encourages fun and creative ways for improving the already-existing culture.

Such creativity can be as boundless. Growth oriented companies are notorious for coming up with notably unusual ways to improve the work environment-off-site retreats, impromptu recognition programmes, and the creative use of office space are all examples of how companies implement creative ideas to build their culture. These are just a few of the ideas often generated from the insights gleaned in a culture audit.



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## Finance Manager

**Qualifications & Experience**

- Membership of a recognised Accounting body, such as CIMA, ACCA or ICASL, with a minimum of 5 years of hands-on work experience in Accounting, at least 3 years of which should have been in a senior capacity
- Proven ability to work both independently and as part of a team; hence, supervisory ability is essential
- Mastery in handling standard accounting software packages and Microsoft Office, especially Excel & Word
- An excellent command of the English language

**Major Duties & Responsibilities**

- Responsible for overall accounting operations, including cash management & financial controls of the company
- Ensuring that monthly financial information is provided to the Head Office in time
- Responsible for the formulation of budgets & monthly comparison of variances to ensure company achieves its budgets
- Responsible for reviewing & evaluating cost reduction opportunities
- Ensuring that the company adheres to all legal requirements currently applicable to Sri Lanka
- In addition to the finance function the selected candidate will be responsible for the Shipping and IT departments of the company
- Ensuring that all suppliers comply with next shipping requirements, including the timely and accurate submission of all shipping documents
- Managing the company's computer systems to ensure adequate systems are in place to meet the information needs of the company

**next step**

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## How to implement strategic planning

The strategic planning how-to question strikes at the heart of, how to make change of any kind happen in your organization. Start by answering why your organization might want to embark on a strategic planning process. Want to be one of the organizations, in which employees understand the mission and goals? They enjoy a 29 percent greater return than other firms. This seems like a good reason to start strategic planning to me. How about you?

**Keys to strategic planning success**

- These are the keys to effective strategic planning for your business.
- Full and active executive support,
- Effective communication,
- Employee involvement,
- Thorough organizational planning and competitive analysis, and widespread perceived need for the strategic planning.

If you are implementing your strategic planning in an organizational environment that is already employee-oriented, with a high level of trust, you start the strategic planning process with a huge plus. An additional plus is an organization that already thinks strategically.

Unfortunately, the implementation of strategic planning most frequently occurs as an organization moves from being traditionally reactionary to strategic. So, often, learning to think strategically is part of the strategic planning learning curve.

Full and active executive support for successful strategic planning

Successful strategic planning requires a large commitment from executives and senior managers, whether the strategic planning is occurring in a department or in a complete organization. Executives must lead, support, follow-up, and

live the results of the strategic planning process. Or, the strategic planning process will fail. It's as simple as that.

Without the full commitment of the organization's senior executives, don't even start strategic planning. Participants will feel fooled and misled. A vision statement and a mission statement, along with this year's goals, filed, unimplemented in a cabinet or computer, is a serious source of negativity and poor employee morale.

Senior leaders can do the following to create a successful strategic planning process.

Establish a clear vision for the strategic planning process. Paint a picture of where the organization will end up and the anticipated outcomes. Make certain the picture is one of reality and not what people "wish" would occur. Make sure key employees know "why" the organization is changing.

Appoint an executive champion or leader who "owns" the strategic planning process and makes certain other senior managers, as well as other appropriate people in the organization, are involved.

Executive support in strategic planning is critical to its success. Executives must lead, support, follow-up, and live the results of the strategic planning process. These are additional ways executive leaders can support the strategic planning process. See the first part of this article for more ways that leaders can support the strategic planning process.

Pay attention to the planning occurring. Ask how things are going. Focus on progress and barriers for change management. One of the worst possible scenarios is to have the leaders ignore the process.

Sponsor portions of the planning or the strategic planning process, as

an involved participant, to increase active involvement and interaction with other organization members.

If personal or managerial actions or behaviours require change for the vision statement, mission statement, values, and goals to take hold in the organization, "model" the new behaviours and actions. (Senior managers must walk the talk.)

Establish a structure which will support the move to a more strategically thinking and acting organization. This may take the form of a Steering Committee, Leadership Group, Core Planning Team or Guiding Coalition.

Change the measurement systems, reward, and recognition systems to measure and reward the accomplishment of the new expectations established through the strategic planning process.

Develop a within your to communicate, reinforce, and provide a structure that supports the articulation and accomplishment of the strategic planning goals.

While every person in your organization cannot make their voice heard on every issue within the strategic planning, you must solicit and act upon feedback from other members of the organization. Integral in the strategic planning process must be the commitment of each executive to discuss the process and the plans with staff members. Too often, I have experienced executives holding information closely and consolidating their own dysfunctional power within the organization at the expense of other company employee's feeling - and acting - excluded. (And then they ask: how can I get my staff to "buy-in" to these new expectations?)

Recognize the human element inherent in any change - the change from reactionary to strategic thinking is a huge leap. People have different needs and different ways of reacting to change. They need .