Managing Difficult Employees
DDAA
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What does the phrase “difficult employee” mean to you?
For what seems like the umpteenth time, Sara has failed to complete on time the assignment you gave her. At least last time, she got it in on time, even if the quality was unacceptably poor.

When you talk with Sara about this situation, you hear what you’ve heard so many times before - “It’s not my fault.” Sara’s list of explanations (excuses) include:

• You didn’t give me enough time to finish this.
• The printer ran out of toner and we didn’t have any replacement.
• She was involved in helping a co-worker with a difficult assignment that Sara had special knowledge about.
• She came to your office to ask some questions about the assignment, but you were in a meeting.
• She had to leave early to take her car to get inspected so she could renew her license plate.
• It’s not her fault.

When you hired Sara over two years ago, you thought she had “promise” and could make a difference. What you’ve seen since then is a gradual revealing of the “real” Sara - who would rather explain (excuse) why she didn’t do something or didn’t do it well enough, than take the time and effort to do it right.

Is Sara a “difficult employee”? How would you manage Sara?
This morning, Nancy, one of your best employees came to you and reluctantly said that she was concerned about the behavior of another employee in your group. What she had to tell you is very disturbing. Nancy told you that Jim regularly uses harsh language, demeaning expressions and threatening body language with several other employees. She said that Jim often refers to other employees as “worms” or “bottom feeders”. Jim often, she says, takes credit for achievements of others, and if they try to make their contribution known, he laughs at them and dismisses them with language like, “As if.”

Nancy says she has not experienced this treatment herself, but she is not happy with it in the work group. Other employees have complained to her about the uncomfortable environment. At least one employee has told her he is considering a transfer to another work group.

Is Jim a “difficult employee”? How would you manage Jim’s behavior?
As you come out of your office you see Ralph coming down the hall toward you. You also see that doors are closing all along the hallway. Guiltily you slip back into your office and close your door. Sitting back down at your desk, you try to figure out what just happened.

And you remember Ralph holding forth in the break room several months ago about dealing with a neighbor whose small dog annoyed Ralph. The story went on seemingly forever. And then you remember that assignment you gave Ralph to work on that didn’t get done, even though he was in your office every day for what seemed like hours talking about the magnitude of the project, the difficulty involved and the creativity needed to see the “Big Picture.” Then you remember the last time you assigned Ralph to work on a team project, and how all but one of the other team members came to you and complained about having to work with Ralph. Finally you recall hearing most of your other employees telling their “tricks” for avoiding Ralph and his endless stories. The big finale is remembering that Ralph, after observing the attention given to one of your younger staff that was getting married, orchestrated a big HAPPY 43rd BIRTHDAY, RALPH party at the office for himself.

What doesn’t come to you are a lot of anecdotes about Ralph’s successes, about positive things other employees have said to you about Ralph’s deliverables or about how much they enjoy working with Ralph. You begin to wonder what exactly does Ralph contribute?

Is Ralph a “difficult employee”? How would you manage Ralph?
It’s All About YOU
What's Your Role?
You’re The Manager
The 80/20 Rule

80% TIME

20% PEOPLE
Your Goal - 80/80
Difficult Employees? Your Payoff?

$100 MILLION LAWSUIT

ADAAA charges

Turnover

Unhappy Customers/ Clients

Low Morale

Lawsuits EEOC Charges Complaints
Worst Case Scenario

The Highly Productive Difficult Employee
It’s Not Personal, It’s Strictly Business.
How to Manage (and Not To Manage)

- The Passive-Aggressive Employee
- The Saboteur
- The Bully
- The Whiner
- Drama Royalty
- The Challenger
The Passive-Aggressive Employee

- Type Identification
- Your Strategy
- Emotional Intelligence
Passive-Aggressive Types

- The Behind-the-Scene Whiner
- The Perpetually Confused
- The Almost-But-Not-Quite
- Not My Responsibility
- The Saboteur
- Secretive, covert undermining
- Deliberately undermines people by not sharing all necessary information
- Engages in pot-stirring, gossip and innuendo
Your Strategy

- Don’t play the game with them
- Try to understand their motives
- Stay centered
- Don’t tolerate passive-aggressive behaviors
- If unresponsive, discipline
- Final option, remove
Other Types of Difficult Employees

- The Bully
- The Whiner
- Drama Royalty
- The Challenger
The Bully

- Intimidates, frightens and torments other people
- Bullies:
  - How dare you question me!
  - It’s all about me
- Bullies: Antisocial tricks to intimidate
Bullies: Your Strategy

- Pick your battles
- Stay centered
- Don’t try to change this person
- Don’t tolerate this behavior
- If unresponsive, discipline
- Final option, remove
The Whiner

- Almost always negative – about everything
- Like bullies, craves attention

Managers – Try this:
- Turn the tables – make the complaint the whiner’s responsibility
- Whiners are seldom “doers” – keep good performance records
Drama Royalty

What helps –
- Help them understand how behavior is counterproductive for them
- Face-to-face interaction best
- Modeling/rewarding desired behavior

What DOESN’T work –
- Rewarding inappropriate behavior
- Allowing time wasting

IGNORING IS NOT AN OPTION
The Challenger

What Helps -

- Explain how behavior is counterproductive to career goals
- Model appropriate behavior
- Listen, respond positively when Challenger offers views/ideas in non-confrontational way
- Pick your battles

What Doesn’t

- Don’t be intimidated
- Don’t give in just to have “peace”
Core Skills For Managing Difficult Employees – Do’s and Don’t’s

- DO deal with it
- DO recognize useful contributions
- DO document your encounters
- DON’T reward bad behavior
- DON’T be drawn into every fight
- DON’T let unprofessional or discourteous behavior go unchallenged
- DON’T punish the innocent with the guilty
- Ignoring is not an option
Basic Employment Law

- State Law – Employment at will
- Federal laws – OSHA, FLSA
- Non-discrimination law – Title VII, ADEA, ADAAA
When Push Comes to Shove...

- The last resort
- The decision to terminate
- Think – Positive Turnover
Documentation

Don’t have it? Didn’t happen.

It’s verification for a legal or quasi-legal purpose.

The best time to start? Just before you think it’s necessary.

If you ask, “Should I document this?”, then your answer is always YES.
How to Keep This From Happening Again

- Analyze what happened
- Improve your hiring process
- Map out what makes a good candidate – and, what isn’t
- Screen out unacceptable candidates
- Avoid the wrong person
Summary

- It’s all about YOU – The Manager
- Ignoring Difficult People - not an option
- There is a set of core skills to address difficult people
- Learn from your (and other people’s) mistakes
Questions?