



STOP BATTLING How to Deal with Difficult Employees

According to workforce guru and motivational speaker Colleen Kettenhoffen, “You can’t change the difficult employee. All you can do is change how you react to them. And, you can change the environment, and hope they become motivated.”

The following is a 3-step plan of action that will help you deal with difficult employees:

STEP 1: ASSESS THE SITUATION

Although it is important to act quickly, never act without preparing.

- Act on facts, not on gossip or rumor. Make sure that you are certain that inappropriate or difficult behavior has occurred.
- Collect all of the facts before you act. Document the facts for easy reference.
- Assess your own role. Make sure that you aren’t a part of the problem, and determine what you can do as a manager to make things better.
- Seek a quiet time where you will not have any interruptions to confront your employee. Flying off the handle during a meeting with others present is not the best time to address the situation. Depending on the issue at hand, decide if you will need to have others present in your meeting, for example, a HR manager.

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STEP 2: CONFRONT THE PROBLEM

The longer an inappropriate behavior is allowed, the harder it will be to correct the problem. Although it may be uncomfortable to discuss, realize that putting off the discussion will not lead to an easier fix.

- Remember to deal with the behavior, not the person. Do not attack the person.
- Use “I” statements. For example, if you have an employee that is chronically slacking off and not contributing, you could say, “I need everyone here to give 100% so that we can meet our goals.”
- Give the person a chance to explain. Maybe the inappropriate behavior was not caused by negative intent, but rather a miscommunication, fear, lack of information, personal issues, motivation, etc.

- Ask questions to find the root of the problem. In turn, this will help you develop a solution that will work for all parties involved.
- Give the person a chance to come up with a solution to the problem. The difficult employee is more likely to take ownership of the issue if he or she is allowed to come up with a plan to resolve the problem.

STEP 3: REINFORCE YOUR MESSAGE

Small issues can probably be resolved after one meeting. However, larger issues may require some enforcement and repetition. Be patient.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

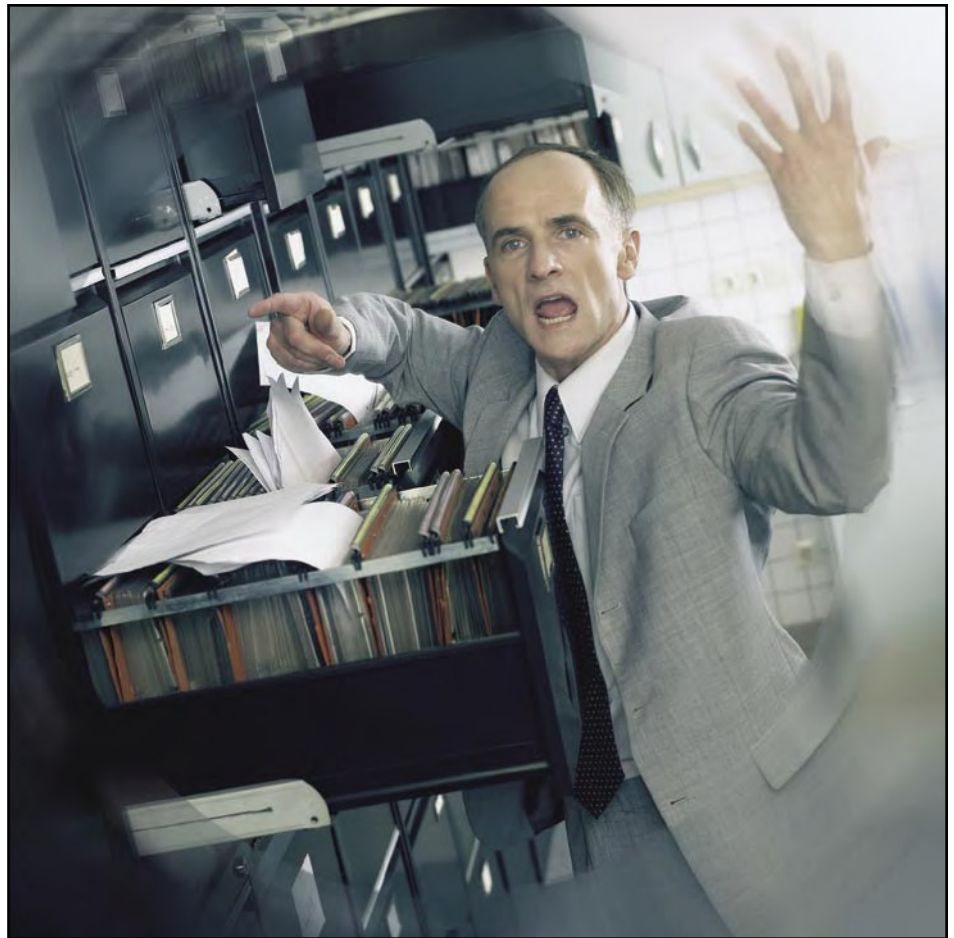
1. KNOW WHEN YOU'RE IN OVER YOUR HEAD

Maybe the employee is difficult due to personal issues, drinking, or drugs. Issues such as these cannot be mended in a quick meeting. Know when to call in professional help or when to escalate the problem to your boss or supervisor.

2. DON'T FORGET TO DOCUMENT

Make sure that you document everything. In general, you will need to show everything you, and everyone else, has done in an attempt to "save" the employee.

Check with your Human Resources department and your manager to make sure you're up-to-date on dealing with a difficult employee effectively.



According to Kettenhoffen, the documentation is not to build a case for termination, but to record what you attempted to do to help the difficult employee. Ask yourself, "Did I do everything I could? What, if anything, is my part in this?" If you've done all you can, the rest is up to the employee.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS

You may need to build a case for termination. According to F. John Reh, "While the goal is always to reach a mutually acceptable solution that resolves the difficult employee's inappropriate behavior, sometimes that is not possible. When you reach an impasse and the employee is not willing to change his or

her behaviors then you need to begin termination procedures in accordance with your company's policies."

References:

Kettenhofen, Colleen. "Thoughts on Dealing with Difficult Employees." http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Colleen_Kettenhofen

Reh, F. John. "Dealing with Difficult Employees." <http://management.about.com/od/employemotivation/a/DifficultEE0605.htm>