**HR**MORNING

# Stopping Difficult People
## from Sucking the Life Out of Your Organization

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**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

ESSENTIAL
INSIGHTS

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# Stopping Difficult People
## from Sucking the Life Out of Your Organization

### Identifying the Three Cs

Are "difficult people" difficult just in the eye of the beholder? No.

To identify truly difficult employees, ask yourself these three questions:

- Is the person's behavior really *causing a problem*?

- Is the person *consistently difficult*?

- Is there a *consensus* on this?

### Are you punishing behavior you don't want – or rewarding it?

Most managers know they should reward employees for behavior they want to see repeated.

But all managers, at one time or another, find themselves unintentionally rewarding, or at least supporting, problematic behavior.

The key to addressing problem behavior is understanding that:

- Punishment can work, but rewards work better

- Behavior that is consistently rewarded tends to be repeated

- Unrewarded, or unreinforced, behavior tends to disappear.

- Intermittent reinforcement is more powerful than constant reinforcement.

## Helping difficult people to change

Once you've decided it's worth making the effort to try to change a difficult person's behavior, make a commitment to see the process through to the end. Pulling back in mid-stream will likely only reinforce the unwanted behavior.

Make sure you are looking at the larger context. Difficult people get some sort of "reward" for their behavior or that behavior wouldn't continue. Those counter-productive rewards must be identified and then withdrawn.

Taking away that reward will leave a vacuum. The need is almost certainly still there, a need that a manager must fill. Plug that hole with practical, meaningful coaching advice that helps the employee see how changing the behavior allows them to contribute more effectively to the organization.

Lastly, a manager must confront the person about the specific behavior that is causing a problem. But once you've taken away the reward – and filled the need the employee was trying to satisfy through his or her unwanted behavior – confronting the behavior is suddenly not as unpleasant a task.

## Riding herd

Your credibility is on the line. Once you've insisted a bad behavior come to an end, that means forever! You must ride herd on the agreement you've made with this employee. Slip just a little, and the behavior could return with a vengeance and person might be even more difficult.

# Stopping Difficult People
## from Sucking the Life Out
## of Your Organization

Every organization has at least one – that difficult person whose behavior leaves everyone else feeling stressed and drained and worse off for having dealt with this person.

What's more, coworkers fear they'll have to deal with this person again and again.

And if someone doesn't do something about it soon ... well, when people start feeling that way, that's the point at which the life has already started draining from your organization.

Sound familiar?

Obviously, nobody wants that. So, what do you do now?

First, ask yourself some tough questions. Why has this person been allowed to operate like this? Does this person's behavior affect everyone this way, or just you? How can this person not help but notice the problems he or she is causing? In short, is it them – or is it you?

And what if this person is your boss?

These are tough situations and they'll require your best management skills to unravel and solve.

But that hard work is only worth it if you think the situation can be fixed.

In some instances when you're dealing with difficult people, the situation can't be fixed, the person won't change, and you'll find the only solution will be to get rid of this person.

But if you believe you can affect a change in this person's behavior, and it's worth your effort, then this Essential Insight will give you

proven steps and techniques you can put into play right now – before that difficult person finally succeeds in sucking all the life out of your organization.

## A burr under your saddle

Since you made the effort to obtain and read this Essential Insight, you've likely dealt with, or are currently dealing with, someone who is a burr under your saddle. If you haven't yet, you will.

To get started, take a moment to complete this sentence:

I would be more effective working with __NAME__if_____.

(Ordinarily, people have no problem coming up with that name but there's no need to actually fill in the first line, especially if you plan on sharing this report with anyone. Make copies first!)

But the second half is not always so easy. That's where the rubber meets the road.

A lot of people tend to fill out this sentence by writing "I would be more effective working with Fred if he would just straighten up and fly right!" Or, "I would be more effective working with Janet if she'd stop whining and being such a complainer."

But that's not going to just happen, or it would have already.

The difficulty with both of those "solutions" is they put the onus on Fred or Janet to make a change.

The manager or supervisor is the one who is going to have to drive this change. So change that pronoun from "he" or "she" to "I."

This is your problem. In most cases, difficult people don't even know they're a problem, yet.

## Are they indeed difficult people?

Many people believe they can pinpoint a difficult person right away, that it's a no-brainer. But that's not always the case.

Considering the frequency of human interactions in a busy

## The 'What' is never negotiable; the 'How' may be

When you have to take action to change an employee's behavior, some will see that there is a problem and work with you to address it. Others won't recognize that there's a problem at all and will resist your efforts.

But you've already decided that change is needed if the employee is going to keep working for your organization. At this point, the "what" is not negotiable.

But there might be room to work with the employee about the "how" – the process you'll use to change the problematic behavior.

If you decide to seek input, remember you're asking for ideas on how to change the behavior, not debating whether the behavior must change.

At this point, it makes no sense to ask the employee, "Gee, do you think we should be doing this?"

Instead, be direct. "Here's what we need to do and here's why we need to do it. This is the outcome I expect and here's why I need your commitment to make it happen."

workplace, it's not the least bit uncommon that those many diverse and different people have differences.

Separating the occasional differences, especially minor differences that have no real negative consequences on the workload, from truly problematic interactions is the key to getting started.

Some of the suggestions made in this report are fairly assertive and should be used only when dealing with the truly difficult person, and not in these other minor instances.

That's why it helps to have clear definitions of who is a difficult person – and who isn't. There's no need to spend a lot of time changing behaviors that aren't causing real problems.

## The 3 Cs of a Difficult Person

A surefire way to identify a truly difficult person is by using the three "C" approach.

The first "C" is to ask: Is the person really causing a problem? Some people can be irritating, but still get the job done and don't infringe on the work of others.

Consider this example: The guy in the last cubicle chews bubble gum at his desk and blows bubbles. He doesn't pop the bubbles and make awful noises and he doesn't stick the gum to the underside of his desk or drop it on the carpet.

But a few people who work near him are embarrassed watching a grown man blow big, bright gum bubbles in his cubicle. One day they complain about it to their manager.

What should this manager do? Who is really causing this problem? Probably not the guy with the gum,

unless gum has been banned in the workplace.

More likely, the people causing this "problem" are the people who feel embarrassed for him. But they are free to own their own feelings and, in this case, not project them onto the bubble-blowing co-worker.

At this point, the co-worker is not a difficult person.

But here's another example: A computer expert is hired to help the marketing team build an online presence for a product. During one of the first meetings of this group, one marketer suggests a slightly different approach than what's been discussed.

"You aren't really qualified to make that kind of judgment," the computer expert responds: "You're not a professional. I am. I have the education to decide what we need to do."

No doubt many of the people at this meeting would be offended by this statement.

If the "expert" continues to make statements like this, the hiring manager will get more and more complaints and soon will be figuring out how to deal with a truly difficult person.

The second "C" is to ask: Is the person consistently difficult? Everyone has bad days, and anybody can be difficult from time to time. Normally, we can write off those situations as them (or us) having a tough day.

And it's important to avoid overreacting to a passing situation. With a truly difficult person, the unwanted behavior is going to happen regularly, enough to truly cause a problem.

The third "C" is to ask: Is there a consensus? Obviously, it would be unwise for a manager to take a vote on whether someone is "difficult." Instead, get out into the workplace, walk around, listen and learn whether others are seeing this person's behavior in the same light as you do.

The key question should always be: Is this person's behavior

causing a problem in my/our ability to get the job done? If the answer is yes, what specifically are they doing that bothers people?

Perhaps they disrupt meetings or say things that offend co-workers or are rude with customers. It is possible they are just being themselves, and in being themselves they do things that cause problems.

The only remedy, if they are going to keep working for you? Changing the problem behavior(s).

If you don't act, the situation will only grow more toxic.

Sure, it might resolve itself – when one or all of the people involved either resign or force you to fire them.

But let's face it, that's a lousy outcome. There are better ways to work towards a real solution.

## Three Principles of Behavior: Are you rewarding or punishing unwanted behaviors?

■ **The first principle of behavior says simply that if you reward a behavior, it will likely be repeated.**

But the reverse is also true. Unrewarded behavior, or unreinforced behavior, tends to disappear.

So why is that person continuing to act up and be difficult when neither you nor his co-workers are rewarding him? Why isn't the behavior disappearing?

In some cases, you or other co-workers are rewarding the behavior without meaning to. More likely, the difficult employee is getting a reward from somewhere else. It's just tough for you (and often even for the difficult person) to identify where it comes from. These kinds of "intrinsic rewards" are tied directly to the unwanted behavior.

An intrinsic reward for the person who tries to dominate every meeting, for example, is the false sense of importance he or she might feel when everyone has to focus on him. The person who comes into work late morning after morning might be rewarding herself with something as simple as getting to stay out later at night or sleeping in longer in the morning.

One way or another, they get a payoff from these behaviors that cause problems in the workplace. And they keep doing them because those payoffs outweigh any negative consequences.

Many times, well-meaning managers reinforce this behavior.

For instance, let's say you have a person who is late for a meeting, so you stop the meeting and go back so you can catch this person up. That's OK once in a while.

But what if this person is consistently late for meetings and you always stop the meeting and update him? Why would this person feel the need to get to meetings on time like everyone else? He always gets the information he needs, anyway. If the rest of the team is wasting time while you recap, that's their problem and yours.

So, what happens when you don't stop to update him? Well, now it's his problem. The next time he shows up late to a meeting he'll have to catch up on his own. For a while, he'll keep wandering in on his own schedule, but he won't like feeling like he's not keeping up with his peers. He'll likely continue being disruptive for a while even when he does show up on time. He may pout and get irritated as he tries to force you to go back to the old way of doing things.

One thing is certain: When you stop reinforcing a problem behavior after a pattern been in place for a while, it's always going to get worse before it gets better.

■ **The second principle of behavior says that intermittent reinforcement is more powerful than constant reinforcement.**

Here's why. Let's say you accompany a child to a grocery store and the minute you walk the child past the candy aisle, the child says "Candy!" You say, "No."

So, the child shifts into second gear and says, "Wwaahhh, I want that candy!!"

You want to be consistent, so you say firmly, "No, no candy." So far so good.

Well, the child goes into third gear and throws himself on the floor and starts a temper tantrum. People are looking up the aisle at you and the child and wondering, but you hang in there and say "No, no candy!"

Now, here comes fourth gear. The kid's screaming so hard he's almost choking and turning red and other patrons think you're abusing the child and they are about to call the cops.

So, what do you do? You say, "OK, here's some candy." And what have you just done?

You have reinforced the very behavior you were trying to avoid. The next time in the store, if this kid is smart, he'll skip the first three gears and jump straight into fourth.

If people at work are used to getting the spotlight when they throw a tantrum, or they're used to nobody saying anything when they're late to work, that's what they'll keep doing. But when a manager decides to change that situation, it's possible things will get hot for a while. Stick with it, or you're headed right back to the old status quo.

## ■ The third principle of behavior says that punishment works, but at a cost.

If you want to change people's behavior, you can punish them for the behavior they're engaged in. Simple enough. It causes them discomfort and, as a result, they will change their ways.

In the workplace we refer to this process as discipline. And when handled properly, discipline isn't really punishment at all, but an effective tool to help people understand the effect of their problem behavior and the benefits of changing – for the organization and for themselves.

Well-handled discipline is a positive way to resolve problems.

Punishment that's not tied to an improvement plan, on the other hand, can be a real morale killer in the workplace, damaging relationships, and hurting the person you punish and those around him.

That's why rewards work better than punishment. It's always better, when possible, to reward people for the behaviors you want them to repeat.

> "The term mutual reciprocity refers to the give-and-take associated with any human relationship. It says that, for a relationship to be healthy, the giving and the taking must eventually balance – much like a bank statement. The Law of Mutual Reciprocity says that to the degree you give others what they need, they will tend to give you what you need. If you treat people right, they will tend to treat you right. Put another way: What goes around, comes around."
>
> **Larry Johnson**
> **Johnson Training Group, Inc.**

# Applying it all to Difficult People

Up to this point, we've addressed some key principles of behavior and how to affect it.

Now it's time to tie all of what's been discussed here back together in a usable way so that you can take actual steps to stop difficult people from sucking the life out of your organization.

We identify a three-step formula for changing difficult employees' behavior:

- Withdraw the reward
- Fulfill the need
- Confront the behavior

## 1. Withdraw the reward.

The first step is to withdraw the reward for the unwanted behavior. If someone is doing something problematic, like disrupting meetings or calling people names, it's time to identify what reward they are getting for that and take it away.

The key here, as many good managers know, is to define the behavior for yourself. You can't just tell yourself that the person is being a jerk, for instance.

What's that really mean? Can you go up to the person and say, "Stop being a jerk!" and expect a result? No. Neither of you will really know what's expected.

Instead, specifically define the unwanted behavior and what sort of reward this person is getting for it. Then be sure he or she doesn't get that reward any more.

If it is an intrinsic reward and you can't take it away, remember that those kinds of rewards will disappear as the behavior disappears.

## 2. Fulfill the need.

There is almost always a need that drives the behavior of a difficult person.

Consider this example: You have an employee who can't keep his mouth shut. He talks and talks and talks, needing to be heard on every issue. He goes into a meeting and tells everyone exactly what needs to be done and rarely takes the time to listen. Naturally, this behavior drives his co-workers nuts.

What a manager can do in this situation is take this person aside before the meeting and ask for his opinion of the topic to be discussed. Listen and hear the person out. Thank him for his time. This fulfills his need to be heard.

Next, during the meeting, take the lead and don't allow this employee to dominate the discussion and drive everyone else nuts. Cut him off if you have to and find a way to paraphrase, in front of everyone, what he told you earlier.

## 3. Confront the behavior.

Once you've set the stage for resolving a problem – you've identified the three "Cs", withdrawn the reward, fulfilled the need preferably at least a couple of times – it's time to confront the behavior and begin the process of getting it to stop completely.

■ **Describe the problem specifically.** It's essential to paint a clear picture for this person of the behavior that caused the problem, telling him or her exactly what occurred and what the results of it were. Avoid generalities and don't assume any motives on the part of the person. It isn't enough to just say, "You're not very nice to customers."

Instead, say something like: "You know, I was watching you work with a customer and when the customer questioned our policy, you sort of rolled your eyes and sighed. And that sent a signal to the customer that you were frustrated and didn't want to hear what the customer had to say."

■ **Describe the impact of the behavior.** "When that happens, a customer may not say anything to you, but they may choose to go elsewhere." Now you are building a fuller understanding of the problem. The impact of the behavior may seem obvious to us, but it may not be obvious to the difficult person, or why would they be doing it? Any good employee knows they won't be keeping their job long if they're driving away customers. If you are bothering with this process, you've already decided this is a person worth keeping, so there must be some good there.

■ **Listen to the response.** This is where the Law of Mutual Reciprocity comes into play. If you want the person to take you seriously and listen to you, you must be willing to do likewise for him. It's the beginning of building, or rebuilding, respect. And remember, you've decided to keep this difficult person if you can change the behavior. If you really do expect to keep him long term, building mutual respect needs to start sooner rather than later.

■ **Ask for what you want.** It is surprising how many managers, having corrected a difficult behavior, fail to tell the employee what behavior they want to see replace the unacceptable behavior. Using the above example, it's essential to say: "I want you to leave every customer with the sense that you are here to make his or her life easier." As part of the planning for this tough discussion, be sure you've thought about exactly what you want to see from the employee.

■ **Be prepared to compromise.** But don't give away the store. It's likely that the difficult person sees his actions as the proper way to handle things. When a manager tries to change this kind of ingrained behavior, the employee may feel the need to save face. They may feel that they are giving up too much and losing status in front of co-workers.

A stated compromise – an honorable win-win, but not an unconditional surrender – is a good option. You could say, "The next time you encounter a customer who is really frustrating you,

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it's OK to turn the customer over to me, or a co-worker." But set clear boundaries on when this is appropriate.

■ **Ride herd on the agreement.** Your credibility with this employee, and other employees who may have noticed your undertaking, is on the line. Once you've said this behavior won't be tolerated, then it can't be tolerated EVER. Give in now and again and things will soon return to where they stood before you began the effort to change it. There is a lot of energy and effort on the line, don't waste it.

## More on Riding Herd: Don't let up until the problem is solved

You may have watched or read about a very memorable 1993 debate between Al Gore and Ross Perot. The topic was NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Gore clearly had been coached to go on the offense against Perot, to do battle on every word and to interrupt Perot constantly. Annoy him. Trip him up. Get him to lose his cool.

If Gore wasn't coached, well, that's exactly what he did from the opening, interrupting again, and again. And it wasn't easy against a speaker like Perot, a hugely successful businessman who was used to people listening to him rather than challenging him.

Now, the second time Gore cut off Perot, the moderator stepped right in. "Just a minute, Mr. Gore," he said firmly, "we need to let each person finish their statement before the other speaks."

The rule had been set. Everyone knew it, the moderator, both debaters and the viewing audience.

But the moderator wasn't the one to enforce it. Perot would have to ride herd on the rule. And he did.

Gore went on to interrupt Perot another 20 times, and each time, Perot would say loudly, "Would you please let me finish?"

It was a great moment in "debate team" brinkmanship. And it was

## Principles of Working with People

■ **Requisite Variety:** All things being equal, the person with the most options will excel in any situation. For example, if you have two mechanics working for you who have exactly equal skills, abilities, intelligence, common sense and motivation, the mechanic who has one more tool in his toolbox, in time, will excel over the others.

■ **Mutual Reciprocity:** To the degree that you can give people what they need, they tend to give you what you need. Of course, this means that you must give first. It doesn't work to expect people to meet your needs before you make the effort to meet theirs. Put another way, "what goes around, comes around."

■ **The Most Powerful Need:** Harvard psychologist William James, the "Father of American Psychology," once said that people spend 80% of their psychological energy trying to gain the attention and approval of other people. He went on to point out that the most powerful need any of us possess is the need to think well of ourselves. Other people's behaviors toward us either reinforce or diminish this need.

■ **The Rule of Buyers' Benefit:** Any good salesperson understands that buyers buy when they can see what's positive in the transaction for them. Likewise, when you confront a person about an issue that needs to be resolved, you are in a sense trying to sell him or her on your point of view. If difficult employees can't see what's in it for them if they change their behavior, the chances are slim they will buy what you are selling and commit to changing.

a clear illustration of the need to stick to the new rule. Perot would have lost considerable stature in the eyes of those watching this debate if he hadn't stood up for himself.

Likewise, once a manager has made an agreement with a difficult employee about changing behavior, the manager must stick to it and enforce it.

## Strategies: Applying these techniques to common difficult behaviors

**The Agreeable Arthur.** These are people who agree to just about everything – every commitment, every schedule, every plan – and then don't follow through. They promise the moon, but rarely if ever deliver.

Or, they agree with every idea or proposal you put forth, then go behind your back and tell other's it's the worst idea they've ever heard.

These folks mean well and are often good performers with their usual tasks. That's why they're still employed.

It's usually only when they try to extend themselves that they cause problems. And the obvious problem is the job doesn't get done, the task doesn't get completed on schedule.

Their need/want is to be an integral part

of the team and not disappoint the manager. That's why they're always volunteering.

If you have an employee who drives you nuts because he agrees with every idea you put forward, no matter how inane, here's how to get started.

Tell such people straightforwardly that you believe they are an important part of the team and thank them for their support. That begins fulfilling the need.

Then, make it easy for them to be honest. You can say: "Jim, I've always respected your opinion and I need it again right now. I have a few points in this report that could use some improvement. Would you help me with those?"

You've set the stage that not all is well in this report, and honest, critical thinking and review is needed.

If it's a big project he's suddenly volunteered for, don't roll your eyes.

But find a way to let him off the hook. Don't let the person agree to do the impossible. He won't do it anyway.

Instead, you can say, "Jim, I really need you focusing on what you're doing right now. I don't want to spread you too thin." You can divvy out a small piece of the project, if you believe the person will complete that part. It will keep him or her feeling integral to the project's success.

When you do give Agreeable a piece of a project, pin him down to a realistic deadline. Give clear expectations and let him discuss his concerns about the project. Then push for a verbal agreement on how it will be executed and when it will be completed.

After that, ride herd! Don't let the agreement slip. Remember, Agreeable Arthur may be across the building right now agreeing to also contribute to someone else's project. If you don't stay on top of things, ol' Agreeable may overcommit elsewhere and be unable to deliver for you. Follow-up is essential.

**The Conversational Rambler** is often a problem because he ties up your time and everyone else's and distracts people from getting work done. The rambler needs to be listened to and feel appreciated.

The trick is to manage the conversation in a way that these needs are fulfilled as you help him get to the point. It's always a good idea to set up any meeting or quick huddle with a rambler about 10 minutes or so before you need to do something else or be somewhere else. That way you can start the discussion by saying "I only have about 10 minutes, so let's use that time wisely."

Once the rambler starts moving off base, which often is very early in the discussion, interrupt gently but firmly.

It helps to say something like: "Let me make sure I understand what you've said so far," then restate and summarize the discussion.

At that point, you've gained a position in the conversation. Don't lose it. Steer the conversation toward a realistic goal.

The manager should always try to wrap up these conversations. "OK, I have to go in one minute. Here's what we said happened, and here's where we'll go from here."

**The Chronic Complainer** is rarely happy. She gripes a lot, but never comes through with a suggestion to solve the problems she's so quick to point out. You can expect her to find the negative in everything and to go out of her way to enlist co-conspirators who will agree with her (if only to escape from the conversation). Sound familiar?

Your first step in trying to change the chronic complainer is to listen without responding. Listening helps in three ways: The complainer gets her gripe off her chest. You get information that you can choose to ignore or respond to. And you can more effectively lead the complainer to problem solving when you understand her perception of the problem.

## Making 'disagreeing' part of the culture

With all the decisions that must be made in a busy business day, it's no surprise people end up disagreeing and, sometimes, get downright disagreeable.

You might be able to avoid a lot of messy and stressful interactions if you make disagreeing part of the culture.

Intel Corporation has done that with good results.

The Intel motto is "Disagree and Commit," and it's written into the corporate values statement.

This means that each employee is allowed and encouraged to speak up and disagree within their circle of influence, which is their peers and immediate supervisors. (No one gets to run around the building and just complain all day).

In exchange for expressing their disagreement without retaliation, each employee must also agree to commit 100% to whatever final decision is made.

"Disagree and Commit" has been credited with easing a lot of the normal day-to-day tensions common within a large organization like Intel, while encouraging strong communication.

For employees, it's a relief valve for some frustrations. And for managers, it's an excellent way to keep tabs on the progress of the work, as well as morale.

Now that you've heard the complainer out, you have three options, depending on what she just told you.

The first option is to take no action at all if it's a truly benign issue. If you believe the complaint has absolutely no merit, or there is nothing you can do to fix it, send the complainer back to work. Tell her, "Hey, let's leave this lie. You can't change the weather!" and get her back to the business at hand.

The second option is to actively disagree that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. The chronic complainer may be lobbying for your support against another person or the organization itself. She wants you as a co-conspirator. When you feel this might be the case, disagree with her that there is a problem here to address. And remember, a non-response can be construed as agreement. State your disagreement firmly and clearly and make it clear you aren't interested in a debate on the issue.

The third option, when you deem there really is a problem and something should be done, is to insist that the complainer participates in solving the problem. Chronic complainers avoid constructive problem solving, so get them to help you fix the problem. Tell them, "You seem to have a good grasp of what's going on. You could be the perfect person to fix it." Then lead the problem-solving discussion, getting the complainer to commit to clear, actionable ideas and a timetable for developing and executing a fix.

Make it clear that it isn't enough just to point out problems. Tell them that, if they're not now working to find a solution, they're going to be part of the reason that the problem persists.

## Fulfilling Needs: Whose job is it, anyway?

As discussed previously, when you are working to change a difficult person's behavior, identifying what needs those behaviors satisfy is the crucial first step. That's the key to redirecting an otherwise valuable employee and transforming them from a sinkhole that pulls everyone else down into a source of positive energy in your organization.

Despite the obvious value of such transformations, it is fair to ask: Is it truly the manager's responsibility to find ways to meet employees' needs in the workplace? Or is it each individual's responsibility to maintain a certain level of professionalism and acceptable behavior?

The short answer is "Yes."

It's the individual's responsibility to practice acceptable behavior. But it's also the manager's responsibility to be sure the employee knows what's acceptable.

Of course, you can't bend over backwards trying to understand and fill meet everyone's needs to the point that you don't get anything else done.

That said, when you create a positive, healthy workplace where people feel they are understood, listened to, and valued, the behaviors that make an employee one of those "difficult people" are going to diminish greatly. That will let you focus on making sure everyone continues to be productive, doing quality work that supports the organization's goals.

Studies show that the most productive and profitable workplaces strive fill four key employee needs:

1. Employees have the technology and other resources needed to do their jobs well.

2. Employees have the chance to use their talents and work at what they do well every day.

3. Employees have a fair opportunity to learn and grow.

4. Managers take the time to give regular and meaningful feedback. Be honest here – have you, as a manager, shared something positive about and with your team in the past seven days?

## Managing Up: Dealing with difficult superiors

It won't always be an underling whose behavior you're trying to change. In real life, the people who manage us can be difficult, too. If you handle the situation tactfully, you can also use these techniques to address problematic behavior with superiors.

Your approach, how you frame the problem, becomes especially important in this situation. A positive approach will have a big impact on whether your effort succeeds in changing the behavior or fails.

Let's say you have a manager who is throwing you assignments at the last minute and leaving you in the lurch. If it happens all the time, it's a problem. Your performance will eventually suffer because of it.

When approaching a superior about changing behavior, be positive and be firm: "Jim, when I get an assignment at the last minute it really puts me in a situation where I have to bail on something else or I can't do as good a job as I normally would do. Can we work out a process where I can better anticipate when these kinds of

assignments are coming? If I can plan around them, I'll be able to give all my projects my best effort."

Remember, what you're saying in reverse is: "Hey Jim, you're an awful planner. Do you know that?" So of course, approach these conversations with caution.

Sometimes the nature of your business won't allow for better planning, for instance if you work for an emergency ambulance service. But at least, having had the discussion, everyone's on the same page and shares an understanding as to why assignments arise at the last minute, and what else may have to be sacrificed to get them done.

Remember, you can't fix everything. If you've thoroughly examined your own situation and you've concluded that your manager is just a jerk and the behavior won't change, that's a lot more difficult. Your first question should be: Is the behavior just annoying or is it really causing me a problem?

If it is, then you may be at the point where you have to either ask for a change of assignment or consider whether it is time to move on to a new opportunity.

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