How to Reduce Negativity in the Workplace

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Agenda

• What is workplace negativity?
  • Why it happens
  • Types of workplace negativity
• How to spot it
• How to stop it
Definition

• “Negativity is often the result of a loss of confidence, control, or community.”
  -Gary S. Topchik

• neg·a·tiv·i·ty
  • The expression of criticism of or pessimism about something; any verbal or non-verbal behavior that causes others to feel upset, depressed, anxious, discouraged, or hopeless.
What causes negativity?

• Old culture mentality
• Lack of accountability
• Lack of employee involvement in decision making
• How promotions and raises are handled
• Miscommunication or a lack of communication
How to spot negativity

Who you should be able to rely on to spot it:
- Managers
- Onsite Human Resources Specialist
- Other employees

Behavior that can signal negativity:
- Defensive or protective demeanor
- Lack of transparency
- Divided teams
- Passive aggressive behaviour
Different forms of negativity:

- **Focusing on the Negative**
  - Focus entirely on a single negative aspect of an experience
  - Dismissing and devaluing positive experiences
- **“All or Nothing” Thinking**
  - Black and white perspective
- **Overgeneralization and Labelling**
  - See a single negative event as a constant pattern of defeat
  - Attach a negative label to oneself or others
- **Jumping to Conclusions**
  - Imagining negative reactions from others and negative outcomes with no basis in fact
- **Personalization and Blame**
  - A person holds oneself, someone else, or something else entirely accountable for an event
Types of negative employees

• Complainers/gripers
  • Characteristics:
    • Always have something negative to talk about
    • May see themselves as powerless
  • How to handle them:
    • Avoid mindless agreement
    • Hear and acknowledge
    • Don’t be afraid to disagree
Types of negative employees

- Gossips
  - Characteristics:
    - Spread rumors
    - Little regard for fact
  - How to handle them:
    - Push for real answers
    - Encourage positive gossip
    - Model the behavior
Types of negative employees

• **Instigators**
  
  • **Characteristics:**
    • Try to pit employees against one another
    • Thrive on drama and unrest
    • May not be obvious
  
  • **How to handle them:**
    • Be aware if one employee is always a part of conflicts (either participating or on the periphery)
    • Discuss directly with employee
Types of negative employees

• **Backstabbers**
  • Characteristics:
    • Step on anybody to move up
    • Take as much credit as possible
  • How to handle them:
    • Know your goals
    • Build authentic relationships in your workforce
    • Make transparency important
Types of negative employees

• **Firefighters**
  • **Characteristics:**
    • Want to be the hero
    • Always on the lookout for “fires” to put out
  • **How to handle them:**
    • State real priorities
    • Acknowledge, but not too much
Types of negative employees

- Exploders
  - Characteristics:
    - Yell
    - Seem out of control at times
    - Have “tantrums”
  - How to handle them:
    - Let them run themselves down
    - Discuss problems calmly
    - Have a solid plan to move forward
Effects of negativity

- Negatively impacts productivity
- Causes performance issues
- Stifles creativity
- Breaks down communication
- Reduces involvement in teamwork
- Lowers morale
- Wastes time and money
- Causes good employees to leave
Negativity by the numbers

• Estimated $3 billion lost per year due to negative attitudes and behaviors at work (Gallup and Bureau of Labor Statistics)

• 1 in 6 employees actively sabotage others (Gallup)

• Turnover can cost 16% to 213% of an employee’s annual salary to replace (CAP study)

• 1 in 8 workers are psychologically committed to their jobs (Gallup)
Strategies to reduce negativity

- Figure out the root of the problem
- Speak with people who have been identified as “negative”
- Ask for explanations

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Reducing negativity

- Be fair and consistent
- Don’t live in your office
- Create a vision for your employees to strive towards with you
- Involve your employees
- Acknowledge the need for good work/life balance
- Make criticisms private
- Know not all negativity is bad

Reducing negativity

• Work on creating a positive atmosphere overall
  • Reduce gossip
  • Recognize employee contributions
  • Listen to grievances
  • Counsel negative employees
  • Have regular meetings
  • Ongoing efforts
Creating a positive environment

• Six essential characteristics of a positive work environment:
  • Caring for, being interested in and maintaining responsibility for colleagues as friends
  • Providing support for one another, including offering kindness and compassion when others are struggling
  • Avoiding blame and forgiving mistakes
  • Inspiring one another to work
  • Emphasizing the meaningfulness of the work
  • Treating one another with respect, gratitude, trust, and integrity

Effects of Positive Practices on Organizational Effectiveness | University of Michigan
Actions to take

- Start a mentoring program
- Keep physical environment clean, comfortable and well-lit
- Say “please” and “thank you”
- Foster collaboration
- Have fun activities during the workweek
- Use positive phrasing
- Don’t overload employees
- Be flexible and transparent
- Train employees properly
- Give and receive feedback
- Let go of toxic employees who won’t change
Addressing negativity

• Before the meeting:
  • Make sure you have a complete picture of what is going on and that it’s accurate
    • Observe the employee during the day and document any problems you see
    • Talk with managers, supervisors and coworkers, if needed
  • Plan to meet with the employee in your office or a neutral location
Addressing negativity

- During the meeting:
  - State concerns generally
  - State results of your investigation and listen to the employee’s views
  - Identify inconsistency in views, if any, and attempt to reconcile them
  - Develop a plan for change if the employee recognizes the need for change
  - If the employee refuses to change or sees no reason too, decide whether they need to be officially warned or if it’s necessary to begin the termination process
Addressing negativity

• After the meeting:
  • Employee has agreed to change their behavior
  • Provide ongoing support
  • Have follow-up meetings
  • Don’t hold past behavior against the employee
Is discipline needed?

• Can a behavior plan easily address it?

• Is it just a lot of minor complaints?

• Does the behavior violate company policy?
Is the behavior protected?

• If you do decide to discipline for negative behavior, make sure the behavior isn’t protected

• What could protect behavior?
  • National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)
  • Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA and ADAAA)
Case studies

• Jan informs you that she doesn’t want to work with Stacy anymore. She says Stacy just wants to unload all her issues, work and personal, and nothing gets done.

• What do you do?
Case studies

- Rick is a great accountant, but he seems to have conflict issues with quite a few other employees in the office. He’s submitted multiple complaints about his coworkers and how he can’t work with them. You haven’t received any complaints from the other employees about Rick or their coworkers.

- What do you do?
• You’ve received multiple complaints from coworkers that Sean is rude and uncooperative with his coworkers. During your investigation Sean informs you that his behavior is due to a disability.

• What do you do?
Benefits of a positive workplace

• Increased productivity
  • Employees are more willing to “go the extra mile”
• Increased morale
• Increased engagement
• More supportive environment
  • For coworkers and the company itself
• Improved relationships with customers
• Better (and more) applicants
Q&A
Reminders

• The recording of this webinar will be available on the G&A Partners website soon (www.gnapartners.com).

• This webinar has been pre-certified for 1 hour of general recertification credit toward PHR, SPHR and GPHR recertification through the HR Certification Institute.

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