How to Deal with Difficult Employees

Essentials tips for new leaders on
getting the best out of every team member

Foreword

As a new leader or front-line manager, have you ever thought how easy life would be if only you didn't have staff?

I sympathize. I really do.

Managing employees is no easy task, even if you're blessed with excellent leadership qualities and a well-established, fully engaged team.

And if you don't yet have that dream team?

Don't panic. Believe me, there is an answer to your problem. In my work as a leadership consultant, I've partnered many experienced and inexperienced managers in helping them nurture and transform challenging workers.

It takes a little time. And it takes a whole lot of willingness to learn, adapt and evaluate. And I don't just mean the 'difficult employee'. I mean you, too.

Tom Northup once said that no great manager ever fell from heaven: successful leadership is learned, not inherited. I couldn't agree more.

I hope you find this guide on dealing with difficult employees informative, insightful and above all inspiring.

Nancy Maki
Leadership Consultant and President of Open Gate Consulting

Contents

Part 1

Identify the Problem

To solve the problem of a challenging employee, you may first need to redefine the problem

Introduction to Part 1

It's every manager's nightmare. Having to deal with a difficult employee. Knowing that every manager under the sun has faced this challenge isn't all that comforting if you're new to the job. But if you don't respond swiftly and effectively, you're telling the rest of your team that lower behavioral standards in the workplace are acceptable. Before you know it, you have a whole team that is resentful and demotivated.

So, it's time to put your best foot forward and tackle this head on. If you're already dreading the process, remember that anticipation is so often worse than reality. That said, let's get started by working out what's going on with the team member who is causing you and others so much concern.

Chapter 1: What is a Difficult Employee?

Let's be honest. We all have moments at work when we can be a little difficult. After all, we're only human, and the workplace can challenge even the most chilled-out employee from time to time. Who hasn't snapped at a colleague, turned up late for a meeting, or (shock horror) moaned about the boss on occasion? I know I have.

So, what is it exactly that makes a manager label someone a 'difficult employee'?

The term 'difficult employee' is often applied to those who display unprofessional behavior *consistently* and *frequently*. They're seen as having a negative attitude. You know the sort. The colleague who turns up late every single day. The team member who always blames others for mistakes made. The co-worker who's hostile to customers and enjoys spreading rumors.

The danger of managers jumping to conclusions
In my work helping business leaders to build productive teams, I often come across managers who find themselves in this situation. The trouble is, I feel it's all too easy for managers—especially first-time managers—to identify the 'difficult employee' as the problem.

They think that if a member of the team is behaving in an unacceptable way, then he or she is the one that has to change. I get it. Life would be so much simpler if only Trevor would arrive on time every day and Jacquie would start accepting responsibility for her sub-standard performance.

But it's not always as clear cut as that. You've got to get to the root of the problem. And you may find that's it's not the employee. What's more, you—as a manager—have much more power to influence your colleague's behavior than you realize.

> **In a nutshell**
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> **Types of negative attitude at work**
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> Many different types of negative behavior are lumped together by managers under the universal catch-all 'a bad attitude'. They include *laziness, tardiness, rudeness, gossiping, grumpiness, moodiness, bullying, mocking others, passing the buck, back-biting, hostility, carelessness,* and *insubordination*. It's essential you can differentiate between these characteristics, so that if one of your team members starts displaying any of them on a regular basis, you know exactly the behavior to target.

Chapter 2: The Impact of a Negative Attitude in the Workplace

If you have team members exhibiting one or more types of negative attitude, you are undoubtedly going to see a negative impact. On the rest of the team, on you (as the manager), on the company and possibly its customers, and—last but not least—on the negative individuals themselves.

It's hard to exaggerate the far-reaching effects of people who constantly behave unprofessionally. First, there are the *tangible* consequences. The missed deadlines. The targets not met. The costly errors. Then there are the *intangible* consequences. The sagging morale. The lack of team cohesion. The damage to the company's reputation.

Lack of engagement and the thorny issue of presenteeism
Employees classified as 'difficult' often lack engagement with the company. In other words, they're not really committed to their job or the company. They're also more likely to be suffering from poor physical or mental health. It's not surprising if they have an absentee rate that is higher than usual.

However, the more common result of lack of engagement is not absenteeism, but something known as presenteeism. This is where the employee comes to work (is present) but displays lower productivity than normally expected. And that can be a hard nut to crack. If you don't tackle presenteeism swiftly and effectively, you risk one or more of your team members quitting.

An employee's negative attitude can also have an impact on the manager. I've worked with managers who feel completely overwhelmed by the situation. Less experienced managers especially report feelings of incompetency, insecurity and manipulation. They're unsure how to deal with conflict in the workplace, so they find themselves swinging between being overly assertive and overly compassionate. That can be very confusing for all concerned.

Chapter 3: Possible Causes of Negative Attitudes in the Workplace

Most of us have worked at some time or other with someone who has a negative attitude. As a colleague, it can be very frustrating to say the least. However, as a manager, you not only share that frustration but also bear the burden of having to change that behavior.

That's not easy, but it can be done.

A good way to start is by acknowledging that most challenging behavior in the workplace has an underlying cause, including:

- personal worries and/or financial stress

- poor physical or mental health

- lack of skills to do the job

- lack of career growth opportunities

- bullying or harassment by colleagues or customers

- feeling undervalued and/or being underpaid by the company

- lack of support and poor communication by management

Ask yourself this: if you were experiencing one or more of these issues, how positive would you be feeling about your job?

Understanding why an employee is behaving in a certain way is the first step toward changing undesirable behavior. And while you may not be able to resolve all the concerns your employee has, you can certainly create a workplace environment that minimizes the unintended consequences and heartache.

By the numbers

According to the Spherion Emerging Workforce Study 2018, significant numbers of employees are planning to jump ship. Dissatisfaction with salary and growth opportunities top the list of why workers want to leave their jobs.

Figure 1
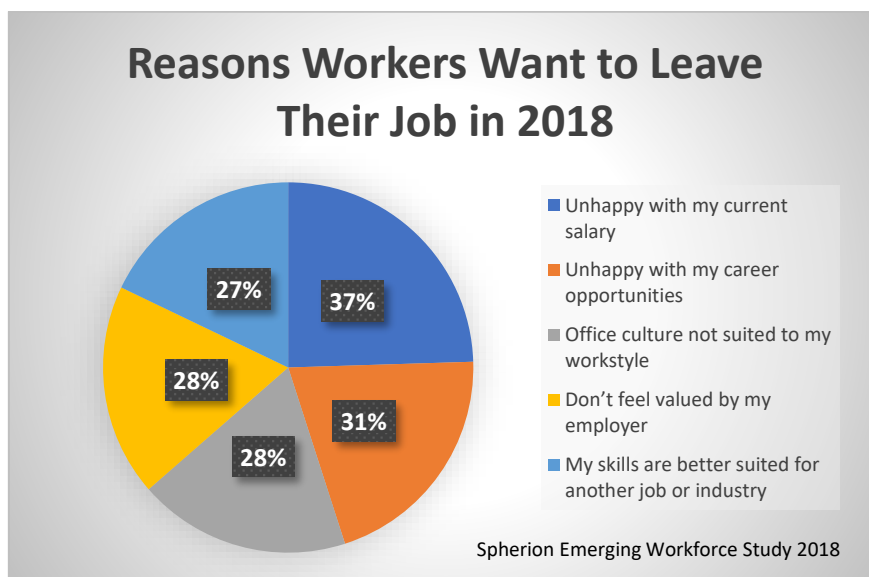
Chapter 4: Question Your Own Attitude

When it comes to challenging behavior in the workplace, why is it that we give some of our colleagues a pass, yet don't hesitate to put others into the unmanageable category?

The reason could lie closer to home than you think.

Most of us like to think that we treat everyone in exactly the same way. Unfortunately, that's not true. As human beings, we all have our biases, conscious and unconscious. Managers are no exception.

If you find yourself being more impatient with one employee in particular, ask yourself why. It could be that the person testing your patience has made the same mistake for the umpteenth time, so your irritation is justified. Or maybe—just maybe—he or she either does not conform to your idea of the model employee or is tough for you to relate to.

Bring unconscious biases into the workplace
According to Laura Berger, a qualified practitioner of emotional intelligence who's spent more than 20 years counseling leaders at Fortune 500 companies, we all bring unconscious biases into the workplace. As she explains in her article Unconscious Bias in The Workplace: You Can't Afford to Ignore It, our 'deeply subconscious attitudes span race, gender, appearance, age, wealth and much more'. They influence everything you think and do at work, 'from the car you drive to the employee you promote and the one you don't'. And you don't even realize it's happening.

The usefulness of being able to examine your own mindset—to understand how you view other people—is something that I emphasize during my facilitation processes with teams and their leaders. Self-awareness in leadership goes an extraordinarily long way to establishing good relationships with each member of your team, enabling you to get the best out of the team as a whole.

In my own leadership development programs, I certainly count self-awareness among the qualities of a good leader. Develop the habit of questioning your own attitude to individuals, especially those who seem to require more of your attention. By recognizing your assumptions, you reduce the risk of assuming the behavioral problem lies with the challenging employee."

Worksheet: Identifying your unconscious biases

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Part 2

Develop an Action Plan

Build your confidence and prepare yourself for success with these preliminary steps

Introduction to Part 2

A goal without a plan is just a wish, as the saying goes. And your goal is to turn a challenging employee into a productive and engaged member of your team. So how are you going to do that? There are occasions when you have to address undesirable behavior on the spot. But for the most part, you'll want to take your employee to one side and have a private conversation.

Now, if the thought of that produces a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach (maybe you've tried it before and failed miserably), don't panic. All it takes is a little preparatory work, some sage advice and a plan of action.

Chapter 1: Gather Concrete Examples of Your Employee's Behavior

Your first step is to gather concrete examples of the unprofessional behavior. This is for your employee's benefit as much as it is your own. After all, you can't convince people of the need to change their ways unless you give precise instances of their conduct.

Whether you make a mental note of these examples or write them down, it's important you describe clearly the behavior that needs to alter. Avoid using vague phrases that mean different things to different people. Phrases like 'not a team player' or 'a poor communicator'. When it's time to have that conversation with your employee, you don't want to leave any room for interpretation. So, break down a general observation into specific remarks.

Need to address the way the receptionist deals with visitors? Replace the term 'a bad attitude with visitors' with 'a failure to smile or make eye contact with visitors or to offer help without being asked'. Don't like the way the billing clerk speaks to customers on the phone? Swap 'your tone of voice is all wrong' with 'you talk too casually to customers in when they're unhappy, and that comes across as being insensitive or condescending'.

Chapter 2: List the Consequences of Your Employee's Behavior

Once you've gathered your concrete examples, you need to draw up a list of the consequences this undesirable behavior has on the employee's performance, the team members and the company. As Deneen Grant, Leadership Strategist and Founder of [Progressive Leadership Group](#) explains, this is a vital step.

"Identifying a negative attitude alone doesn't really help understand its impact. Because it's not the attitude itself that's the real problem for the manager but the *consequences* of that attitude. Is it that they're not working with other team members, or not respecting you and just giving you a bunch of saltiness for doing your job? What is the manager really having to deal with because this

person is so negative? That's an important step. To work out the negative impact of the negative attitude. And then start dealing with that versus the attitude itself."

The tangible and intangible implications of negative behavior
When you're making your list of consequences, it can be helpful to think in terms of tangible and intangible.

Tangible consequences are usually easier to identify and quantify. If the sub-standard performance of your assembly-line operator results in a failure to meet departmental targets, for example, you can produce a report showing the reduced daily output.

Intangible consequences are by nature harder to explain or prove. Itemizing your observations is a useful method. For example, 'When I hear you talking negatively about people, I notice your teammates looking the other way, and their body language seems uncomfortable,' or 'I've noticed that our regular customers avoid dealing with you. That means your colleagues are handling significantly more orders, which is leading to resentment and dissatisfaction in the team'.

As with the previous step, it's essential that your list of consequences is specific, factual and objective. Do not exaggerate. Don't say 'always' when you mean 'sometimes'.

On the other hand, you have to mean what you say. This is not the time for making light of a situation. If you don't cut short this negative attitude, you're going to be facing a much bigger problem down the line. So, choose your words carefully, but steel yourself for telling the unvarnished truth.

Chapter 3: Map Out the Desired Outcome of the Situation

Now you've got your examples of undesirable behavior and list of consequences, it's time to decide how you'd like to see your employee change. Again, it's important to be explicit. The work you do here will represent what you plan to accomplish in the later conversation with your employee.

Saying 'I want you to improve your attitude' or 'I want you to be nicer' really isn't helpful to your employee. However, 'I'd like you to say good morning to people when they walk in the office, offer to get the morning coffees now and then, and own up to your mistakes' is much more constructive.

Part of your job as manager is to help your employees improve their performance and their behavior, but they can only improve if you are clear about your expectations. You have to spell out what it is you want them to do. You need to give them something to work with. Many managers view these things as obvious or fear they are being too simplistic. But it's important to realize that everyone has a different perspective. What seems obvious to one person may not be clear to another.

The necessity of clearly defining your expectations
Setting out expectations is an essential managerial skill. Yet, according to Grant, it's the one skill that's most often lacking, even among top executives. "Few senior managers have the ability to hold people accountable. They've never honed the skill of clearly defining expectations for people. If you haven't laid any expectations out, you're going to be in big trouble. So that's the skill I recommend all first-time and first-line managers developing, so they can harness that skill as they climb the career ladder."

The added bonus of writing down your desired goals at this stage is that it will help you focus later, during that essential conversation with the employee. But it's also a good opportunity to check in with yourself.

"Ask yourself up front: have I established the behavioral norms for my team?" advises Grant. "The best way of doing that is to align your expectations with the values your organization subscribes to. But if you're not that deep, you should at least be figuring out how your team is going to work together. And, ideally, you would have your employees as part of that conversation. Do that, and it's so much easier to bring them back in line with your behavioral expectations when necessary."

Worksheet: Setting out your expectations

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Brilliant tip

Plan what to say, but don't draft a script

If you're not used to holding difficult conversations with employees, you may think it's a good idea to draft a script. But it's unlikely your script will go according to plan, according to Holly Weeks, author of *Failure to Communicate*. Your employee doesn't know his lines, so when he goes off script, you'll be thrown off balance. And if you keep returning to your lines, the whole discussion becomes weirdly artificial. Her advice is to approach it as just a normal conversation. Keep the dialog flexible and have some stock answers up your sleeve for those difficult moments.

Part 3

Open Up a Dialog
It's time to bite the bullet, have that conversation, and bring about some positive changes

Introduction to Part 3

The moment to sit down with your employee and discuss the issue at hand has arrived. Many experienced and inexperienced managers get nervous at this stage. Some would rather avoid a discussion altogether, others are more willing, yet totally unsure how to handle the conversation.

If this sounds like you, don't worry. You're human. Like all things, you'll become more proficient with practice. In the meantime, it's a good idea to follow these tried and tested methods.

Chapter 1: Be Transparent About the Reason for The Conversation

You're probably familiar with the 'sandwich approach' to giving negative feedback. It's imparted to all aspiring managers. Surprisingly, therefore, leadership strategist Deneen Grant is not such a big fan of it when it comes discussing an employee's unprofessional behavior.

"Don't sugarcoat it," she says. "I know the theory about sandwiching challenging feedback in between positive feedback. But I would say you should attack it head on. Share your observations by saying something like 'Your interaction with others has come to my attention. I want to talk to you about it and get your side of the story.' Don't go into the conversation with some soft-soap about their strengths and then suddenly switch to their unacceptable behavior and what you're going to do about it. Stay on message."

Negative feedback and temptation to put off the inevitable
Roger Schwarz, organizational psychologist, speaker, and leadership team consultant agrees with Grant. In his article *The "Sandwich Approach" Undermines Your Feedback (Harvard Business Review, Apr 2013)*, he explains how this common method can destabilize both your feedback and your relationships with your staff.

His work with leadership teams has led Schwarz to conclude that some leaders use the sandwich approach because they're uncomfortable giving negative feedback. Unfortunately, 'easing in' does nothing to dispel the manager's anxiety. In fact, Schwarz is convinced it does the opposite. He feels the longer you put off giving negative feedback, the more anxious you'll become. And just to make it worse, your employee will sense your discomfort and become more anxious as well.

The takeaway from both these experts is: Don't start with some positive feedback to relax your employee, then give the negative feedback (which is the real purpose of the conversation), and end with more positive feedback. This won't prevent your employee from be disappointed or angry when they leave your office. What it will do is cause confusion. Then you risk losing both your message and the respect of your employee.

Chapter 2: Focus on Reaching a Mutually Beneficial Outcome

It can be tempting for inexperienced managers to think that they have to take unilateral control of any conversation. After all, they're in charge. However, that approach is not always effective, especially when giving negative feedback to an employee. A more productive approach is collaboration. This may require a shift in mindset though.

The advice from Schwarz is to start thinking of negative feedback as a way to help your employee improve and to help you discover information that you may be missing. Consider it an opportunity to make informed choices together.

Like Schwarz, Grant stresses how important it is to get your employee to tell you what's going on. And for you to sit back and listen. "Because there could be something happening that you won't understand unless you hear both viewpoints. So, get both sides of the story. That's essential in this in this sort of conversation".

Demonstrate your desire to be collaborative
When giving examples of unprofessional behavior, it's easy to come over as aggressive. That doesn't encourage collaboration. I suggest interspersing your examples with questions like 'Why do you think this is so?' or 'Are you aware that you are coming across this way?' By asking for their perspective on things, you're showing the employee that you want to be collaborative rather than combative.

I also recommend watching out for defense tactics that can derail your conversation. I've come across this so many times in my consultations and coaching sessions with leaders. Defensive employees, on hearing negative feedback, react in a variety of ways, from blaming others and playing the victim to having a tantrum and storming out. That can be a showstopper for a nervous, inexperienced, or new leader.

As a manager, it's your job to stay calm, listen carefully, and show signs of empathy when appropriate. But don't get side-tracked. Don't fall into the trap of having a protracted conversation about who said what and when and why. Bring the conversation back on track, gently but firmly. Remember, you need to focus on reaching an outcome that benefits all parties.

Brilliant tip

Remind yourself that the employee has the right to feel emotional about your feedback. But as a manager, it's your role to take the high road and keep your emotions in check (don't respond to anger with anger, for example). Tell yourself this is a great opportunity to find out what's going on with the employee, even if you are feeling uncomfortable with the process.

Chapter 3: Establish Expectations and Accountability Levels

Holding employees accountable for their work performance is one of your duties as a manager. To do that, you need to address their poor performance. The collaborative approach outlined in the previous chapter should elicit the underlying reason for the poor performance. Armed with that information, you can decide how best to obtain the change you're seeking.

Be creative in finding solutions and adapt to the individual needs of your employee. Those needs will vary depending on their personality and their level of experience. Best of all, invite the employee to take part in coming up with a solution. That may involve you having to make some changes as well.

Regardless of the steps needed to rectify the situation, you must be crystal clear about the action or behavior you expect from the employee going forward.

The importance of giving employees clear responsibilities and guidelines
"A manager's responsibility is to be communicative and to treat people equitably. To clearly inform the team what their jobs are and what is expected of them. Those are the things that lead to an employee who is engaged and satisfied," explains Grant. "The employee will be thinking, 'I know what my job is, I know what's expected of me, I have the resources to do it, and my direct supervisor cares about me as a human being'."

Demanding a level of accountability based on clear expectations is essential in Grant's book. "If you have those things in place," she says, "then, for the most part, you're going to have an employee who not only comes to work but also is ready to work and act as part of the team.

"And if all those conditions exist but the employee still has personal problems that cause them not to meet the group's norm? Then the best thing you can do as a leader is to show empathy, offer external support, and explain that you still have to hold him or her to the same expectations that you hold others."

Tough love? Perhaps. But it will save you and your employee a lot of heartache down the line.

Worksheet: Your expectations

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By the numbers

The Global Benefits Attitude Survey conducted by Willis Towers Watson in 2017 reveals that over 40% of employees are struggling with both health and financial worries, which is affecting their performance at work (Figures 2 and 3) and that their levels of absence, engagement and stress are much higher than those of their colleagues who have neither health or financial worries.
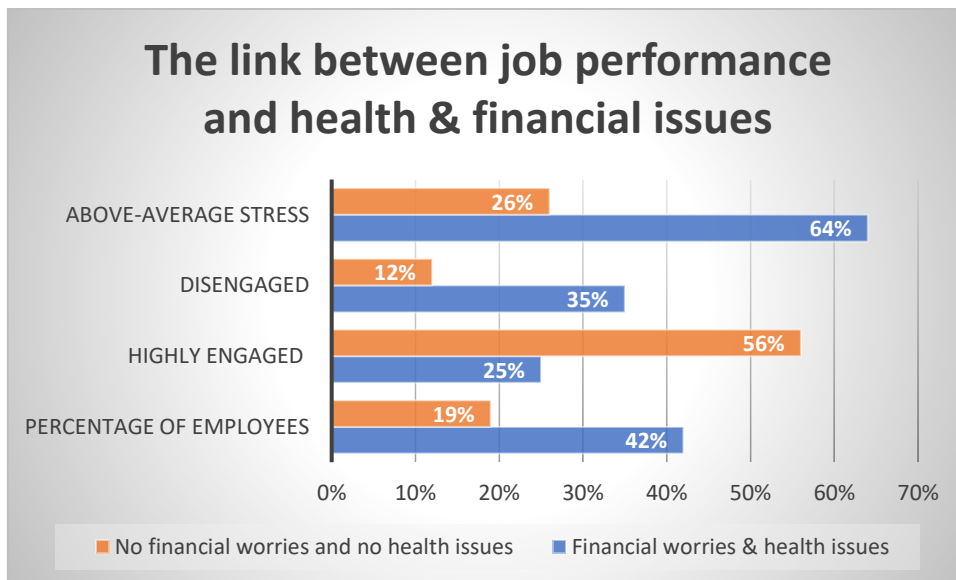
Figure 2

The link between job performance and health & financial issues

	No financial worries and no health issues	Financial worries & health issues
ABOVE-AVERAGE STRESS	26%	64%
DISENGAGED	12%	35%
HIGHLY ENGAGED	56%	25%
PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES	19%	42%

Figure 3

The impact of health & financial worries on absence and productivity

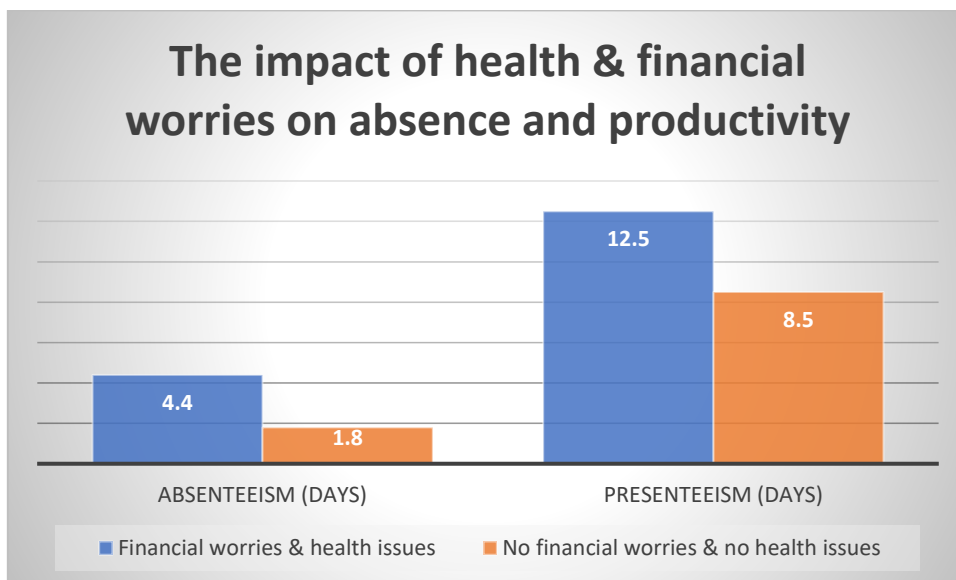|	Financial worries & health issues	No financial worries & no health issues
ABSENTEEISM (DAYS)	4.4	1.8
PRESENTEEISM (DAYS)	12.5	8.5

Part 4

Enforce Improved Behavior
Stick to your chosen course of action, and be willing to change your own behavior

Introduction to Part 4

You've had that difficult conversation, and you've worked out with your employee what needs to be done to rectify the situation. Now it's time to make sure that the actions you've both agreed upon are actually carried out.

In other words, you need to follow through.

Chapter 1: Self-correct Your Own Attitude

Once the dust has settled after a disagreement with a friend or relative, do you ever take the time to examine the part you played? To ask yourself if you did anything to provoke the situation or question if you reacted in the best way possible. Or do you just put the entire blame on the other person?

It can be hard to hold a mirror up to yourself and see your failings. Even harder to then go and make self-improvements. But for managers who are dealing with undesirable behavior at work, self-awareness is an essential part of the process. If you've ever asked yourself 'what makes a good leader', this is it.

I have to admit my heart sinks a little when I hear managers coming up with phrases like 'I have to deal with difficult employees' or 'I don't know how to handle this person's negative attitude'. While totally true, this language suggests to me that the manager sees the employee as the problem. Period. Yet, it's so often the case that it's the manager who needs to examine his or her mindset. A large part of the problem is often how the manager views different people."

Forming the good habit of self-reflection

I know it can be uncomforting for leaders of any level to hear. No one really likes to discover that they could be part of the problem. That they may have unconscious biases or poor management skills. But my many years in developing effective leadership qualities and behavioral health have convinced me that self-reflection—the willingness to see ourselves as others see us—is a great tool to have in your managerial tool box.

Chances are that, during the conversation with your employee, you were confronted with some hard truths. Maybe you were criticized for micromanaging, not being accessible, or not being supportive. If you felt a little uncomfortable hearing these comments, that's good. It means that you were using your listening skills and that you're open to feedback.

Find a moment to question your attitude with this employee. Could you demonstrate trust by giving the employee more responsibility? Or show more interest in the employee as a person in an effort to learn more about them and what makes them tick? Maybe you could develop some new habits to change your own behavior.

Don't skip this step. To grow as a manager, you need to adopt a self-improvement mindset. It will enable you to develop your leadership skills and review their effectiveness.

Worksheet: Question Your Own Attitude

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Chapter 2: Know When and Where to Seek Help

In all likelihood, you'll be able to resolve most of the issues connected with your challenging employee using your own resources. Organize some developmental opportunities, re-arrange the roster, provide more rewarding work, and so on. But you may need a helping hand when it comes to personal problems or more intractable work-related problems like bullying and extreme personality clashes.

If you work for a large or mid-sized organization, your employee may well have access to some sort of [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP). This confidential workplace service is provided by the employer, so it's free to use. It advises employees on a wide range of issues, with the aim of helping them remain productive at work.

Know your limitations as a manager
Issues like drug addiction, anxiety, grief, domestic violence and crippling debt are simply beyond the ability of any manager to resolve. If you find yourself in this position, the best thing you can do is explain that this is an area you can't help with, but you know that professional counselors are available. Then provide the phone number of the EAP service.

Reassure your employee that they can trust the EAP service. All EAP counselors are required to maintain strict confidentiality and follow [HIPAA protocols](#), so they won't share specific employee information with managers or others. In other words, your employee needn't fear that you'll somehow discover they have, say, a drug or mental health problem.

Managers can also use the EAP service, so don't overlook using this service for yourself. All you have to do is call and explain you want a management phone consultation. This type of service is also confidential. Alternatively, consider seeking advice from a mentor, a senior manager or a Human Resource manager. Talking through the issues and asking for practical tips from those who know exactly what you're experiencing can help enormously.

Finally, if the situation with your employee comes down to a medical issue, whether physical or mental, you will need to consult with your Human Resources team to guide you through this process. The stakes are too high to go it alone. They can determine if your employee can still perform the essential functions of the job, including the behavioral standards you expect from all of your team.

With a little effort, you'll find there are many resources available for you to use. You don't want to walk this road alone. Find your resources and use them when you need that extra support

> *Good to know*
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> In 2017, the greatest impact from using EAP counseling is on presenteeism and life satisfaction (a 27% and 19% reduction respectively). That's according to the latest WORKPLACE OUTCOME SUITE (WOS) Annual Report. The WOS, which measures the effect of EAP counseling on key aspects of workplace functioning, also revealed positive effects (though to lesser degree) on absenteeism, work distress and work engagement.
>
> Interestingly, demographic, clinical and contextual factors seem to have almost no practical impact on the effectiveness of EAP counseling. In general, the outcome is more or less the same, whether the employee is male or female, old or young, reporting anxiety, substance abuse or financial problems, and works in government, manufacturing or technology.

Chapter 3: Set Aside Time for Informal One-to-One Conversations

A common complaint among employees is not having regular access to their boss. As a consequence, they may feel undervalued, ignored or uncared for. They don't really know the boss, and the boss certainly doesn't know them, so why should they be engaged with their job or the company?

"Meeting the different needs, styles and motivations of your employees comes from having a relationship with your team members," says leadership strategist Deneen Grant. "If you're experiencing challenges with a team member, it could be a sign that you're not spending enough time with this person. I'm not talking about taking them out for a pizza after work but creating time for you and your employee to talk about what's going on with their work. If things start to go a little askew and you see it's starting to have an impact, that one-on-one time is the perfect moment to have that necessary conversation."

Setting aside a regular time to speak person to person is what most managers don't do, according to Grant. "If they did, it would circumvent this issue of having to deal with challenging behavior." Unfortunately, many managers isolate their private discussions to appraisal situations.

Don't rely on appraisals to address negative behavior
However, appraisals don't happen frequently. Many employees need weekly, maybe even daily, feedback to keep them focused on their goals and happy in their work. What's more, appraisals tend to turn into one-way lectures about how well or poorly the employee did this time and how he or she can improve next time. That doesn't always sit nicely with the employee.

One-on-ones are different, explains Grant. "They happen routinely so that the employee can look forward to that personal time with a leader. Some leaders do it every week, or bi-weekly or once a month, depending on the size of their team. Spending that time getting to know the person means you'd know what their motivators are, you'd know what stresses them out. And then you'd know how to react to their behavior if it starts to become unprofessional."

Finding an effective way to communicate with your staff is the key to successful leadership. Develop a method that suits your personal leadership style and the personalities of your team members.

Here's a final thought from me: It can be tough for first-time and front-line managers to carve out time for individual employees. But it's worth doing. You really do reap what you sow. In this case, the reward is the opportunity to develop good working relationships with each and every member of your team. And that is the secret to becoming an effective and encouraging manager.

Afterword

Nurturing difficult employees and transforming them into productive members of a team depends greatly on a manager's level of empathy and self-awareness.

In this guide, I've tried to show you how easy it is to assume that the employee displaying unprofessional behavior is the problem. And how much harder it is to admit that you may also have a part to play.

By developing good habits and by approaching the situation with fairness, decisiveness and responsiveness, you can work with even the most challenging of employees.

I sincerely hope that this book helps you in your journey to great leadership.

Nancy Maki
Leadership Consultant and President of Open Gate Consulting

Nancy Maki's first-hand knowledge of how organizations function and the common roadblocks to success equip her to train leaders of small- and medium-sized businesses in liability and risk management, while her unusually strong understanding of human behavioral issues is applied effectively to leadership development programs. Nancy's research into the issues of workplace aggression and gender differences in response to stress have been published in the North American Journal of Psychology.

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Don't hold back. Join our team.	Email us to schedule a consultation with no obligation: nmaki@opengateresources.com
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