

# Employment

Sunday January 1, 2012

By F. John Reh,

All managers will have to deal with difficult employees during their careers. First, there will always be difficult employees. Second, it's your job as the manager to deal with them. If you don't deal with the problem, it will only get worse.

## Why Are Difficult Employees Like That?

Difficult employees are that way simply because it is a behavior that has worked for them in the past. They may not know any other behavior or they may choose this behavior when they think it will be most effective. You will be successful in dealing with difficult employees only to the extent that you can make these undesirable behaviors no longer effective for them. In many ways, it's like dealing with children. If every time a child screams, its parents give it candy, what will the child do when it wants candy? It will

## Dealing with difficult employees

scream, of course.

The same is true for the employee who "blows up" whenever anyone disagrees with him. When he does that people stop disagreeing with him and he thinks he has won.

## How Can A Manager Deal With Difficult Employees

### Evaluate

It is important when dealing with difficult employees to act quickly. Often you will need to act almost immediately to neutralize a dangerous situation. However, it is always appropriate to think before you act. Clearly if an employee comes to work with a gun, you will need to act more quickly than when someone complains that another employee is always taking credit for her work. In either case, take the appropriate



amount of time to evaluate the situation before you act. You don't want to make it worse.

Recognize that most employees can be "difficult" from time to time. This can be caused by stress on the job or

away from it. Some employees are difficult more often than others. It is not always your least-productive employees who are difficult. So take a moment to evaluate each situation for the unique situation it is.

### Do your homework

Always act on facts. Don't base your actions on gossip or rumor. The person spreading the gossip is a difficult employee in their own way. If you have not seen the inappropriate behavior yourself, look into it. Ask the people reportedly involved. Collect all the facts you can before you act.

Don't use the fact that you haven't seen the inappropriate behavior as an excuse to delay doing something. It is important to act promptly.

Make sure you aren't part of the problem. It will be much more difficult to remain calm and impartial in confronting the difficult behavior if you are partly responsible. If that's the case, be sure you acknowledge your role in it, at least to yourself.

### Develop a plan

You're a manager. You know the value of planning. This situation is no different. You need to plan the timing of the confrontation. You need to select a quiet, private place where you won't be interrupted. You need to decide whether you need to have others, like an HR representative, present in the meeting. Plan the confrontation and then make it happen.

When you have prepared, it is time to act. You do not need to act impulsively, but you must act quickly. The longer an inappropriate behavior is allowed to continue, the harder it will be to change it or stop it.

### Confront the problem

Don't put it off. It may not be pleasant, but it's an important part of your job. It will not "fix itself". It can only get worse. You

have planned this confrontation. Now you need to execute.

### Deal with the behavior, not the person

Your goal is to develop a solution, not to "win". Focus on the inappropriate behavior; don't attack the person.

Use "I" statements like "I need everybody on the team here on time so we can meet our goals" rather than "you" statements like "you are always late".

Don't assume the inappropriate behavior is caused by negative intent. It may be from fear, confusion, lack of motivation, personal problems, etc.

Give the other person a chance to develop a solution to the problem. They are more likely to "own" the solution if they are at least partially responsible for developing it.

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## How to implement strategic planning

The strategic planning how-to question strikes at the heart of how to make change of any kind happen in your organization. Start by answering why your organization might want to embark on a strategic planning process. Want to be one of the organizations, in which employees understand the mission and goals? They enjoy a 29 percent greater return than other firms. This seems like a good reason to start strategic planning to me. How about you?

### Keys to Strategic Planning Success

These are the keys to effective strategic planning for your business.

Full and active executive support, Effective communication, Employee involvement, Thorough organizational planning and competitive analysis, and Widespread perceived need for the strategic planning.

If you are implementing your strategic planning in an organizational environment that is already employee-oriented, with a high level of trust, you start the strategic planning process with a huge plus. An additional plus is an organization that already thinks strategically.

Unfortunately, the implementation of strategic planning most frequently occurs as an organization moves from being traditionally reactionary to strategic. So, often, learning to think strategically is part of the strategic planning learning curve.

### Full and Active Executive Support for Successful Strategic Planning

Successful strategic planning requires a large commitment from executives and senior managers, whether the strategic planning is occurring in a department or in a complete organization. Executives must lead, support, follow-up, and live the results of the strategic planning process. Or, the strategic planning process will fail. It's as simple as that.

Without the full commitment of the organization's senior executives, don't even start strategic planning. Participants will feel fooled and misled. A vision statement and a mission statement, along with this year's goals, filed, unimplemented in a cabinet or computer, is a serious source of negativity and poor employee morale.

Senior leaders can do the following to create a successful strategic planning process.

Establish a clear vision for the strategic planning process. Paint a picture of where the organization will end up and the anticipated outcomes. Make certain the picture is one of reality and not what people "wish" would occur. Make sure key employees know "why" the organization is changing.

Appoint an executive champion or leader who "owns" the strategic planning process and makes certain other senior managers, as well as other appropriate people in the organization, are involved. Executive support in strategic planning is critical to its success. Executives must lead, support, follow-up, and live the results of the strategic planning process. These are additional ways executive leaders can support the strategic planning process.

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