

Factors That Contribute to Problem Behavior in the Workplace

Most employees perform acceptably, if not exceptionally, under sometimes trying conditions. Occasionally, however, it's the problem behaviors of a few that consume much of the manager's time. Here are ten factors that can contribute to problem behavior in the workplace.

1. Inadequate standards, training, or too much responsibility too soon.

Employees take their cue from you, their boss. If you haven't set clear standards, or haven't seen to it that your employees have the training needed to do their jobs, the results will show up in sloppy work habits, lagging productivity, poor quality work, and confusion.

2. Conflicting objectives.

Congruity, or at least correspondence, between individual and organizational objectives is imperative to a smoothly managed operation. It is the manager's responsibility to help establish the connections between these two sometimes opposite poles. If employees do not perceive that they have an identifiable stake in the enterprise, their enthusiasm and effort will wane and their tacit or overt resistance will rise.

3. "Strutting" and/or failure to "walk your talk."

A CEO friend remarked that "being a successful CEO in today's world requires a certain amount of controlled arrogance." I disagree. Ego, arrogance, and disparities between word and action are antagonistic to effective leadership. Further, they are triggers likely to set off rounds of employee resentment and sabotage.

4. Tolerating

Laziness and lack of motivation on the part of boss or employees lead to average performance at best and, at worst, behaviors that soon get out of control, such as foot-dragging, grouching, and blaming. Strong motivation and exceptional performance follow high self-esteem. It is the manager's responsibility to make positive requirements of his/her employees that they may surpass even their own notions of how capable they are.

5. Sharing your weaknesses.

Some managers attempt to build rapport by sharing their problems, fears, and shortcomings with their employees. Predictably, the results of these efforts are usually opposite from those anticipated. Employees resent the thought that the boss is less than an accomplished professional.

6. Intolerance of failure.

Bosses who accept only successes from their employees create an environment where caution rather than risk prevails. Failure, in many cases, is simply the price that must be paid for learning and for subsequently higher performance. To some extent, the boss is coach – encouraging, cajoling, challenging, and applauding – even the failures when they lead to greater awareness of what it takes to succeed.

7. Dishonesty.

The recent emergence of “ethics managers” in some organizations suggests that ethical behavior and honesty have not been adequately recognized as contributing to long term corporate success. One such officer, revealing what might have been the starting point for his assignment, spoke candidly of the need to develop a policy with respect to the “ethics of compromise.” Employees don’t see it that way. While the issue may be grey when viewed from the executive suite, for those at the working level, it is clearly black and white.

8. Lack of discipline by example.

In this age of flat organizations, cross-functional teams, and multiple reporting relationships, discipline is instilled more by example than fiat. The boss who arrives late and leaves early, or accepts less than accurate work from himself or others, has no cause to complain when the work of his/her unit is below par. Exemplary performance on the part of the boss, being able to say confidently, “do as I do AND as I say,” leads to higher productivity, greater cohesiveness, and reduced problems on the job.

9. Leading by instruction rather than discovery.

If you, as a manager, aren’t aware of the difference between these two, and are not willing to forgo the first in favor of the second, you can anticipate problems with your employees. One role of the manager is to teach, but in today’s workplace where knowledge workers reign, teaching must be attended by a subtle awareness of what it takes to stimulate, intrigue and learn, especially in complex task areas.

10. “Stepping over” problems.

Bosses who procrastinate in dealing with employee problems can expect to see them multiply and expand. The rule is – and there are few exceptions – “overlook it today and you’ll fall over it tomorrow.”

(Reference: Shale Paul, “The Top 10 Factors That Contribute to Problem Behavior in the Workplace,” Copyright 2001 by CoachVille, Published by CoachVille, <http://www.coachville.com>.)