



# Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
March 2022

## Managing Toxic Employees

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**You've worked with them before, and managing them can be a challenge: toxic employees. We are not just talking about difficult employees who fail to conduct themselves appropriately at work, don't work well with others, or generally under perform. We are talking about those toxic workers who cause harm as their negative behaviors spread to other team members, causing a pattern of de-energizing or de-motivation.**

Although we attempt to avoid hiring toxic people, sometimes they slip through into our organizations and managing them can create big problems for you. As a manager, you are responsible for making every effort to create a positive workplace where you and your team members can thrive and be successful.

### 5 Helpful Tips on Managing Toxicity

Use these tips to walk through how to manage these challenging situations and how to take care of your own mental health at the same time:

**1. Check in.** Schedule a one-on-one to see if there is anything else going on that is creating anxiety or undue stress in their life. Are they having personal problems within their family? Do they feel undervalued at work? Did they receive bad news recently and are having difficulty processing it?

Take the time to speak authentically with your employee and help get to the root of this toxic behavior. Often, these external stressors can manifest for a person as emotional symptoms such as irritability, mood swings, or angry outbursts. You can use this information to coach the person or to suggest resources such as calling the EAP.

**2. Give feedback.** Toxic employees are often oblivious to the impact they are having on their team and the workplace. Give them an opportunity to address the problem and make changes by approaching them with direct and honest feedback. A helpful guideline is to three key piece of information: situation, behavior, and impact.

For instance, you may need to address negativity during team meetings with an employee. You can say, "In meetings (situation), your comments or questions are typically negative/pessimistic (behavior) and it makes it difficult to generate solutions as a team as well as to build relationships that could lead to success in the organization (impact)." This helps to avoid the sense that the feedback is a personal attack. Give the employee a chance to listen, respond, and then discuss what specific changes you'd like to see.

**3. Address behaviors.** When you see the toxic behavior, call it out in the moment. The employee may be running on autopilot and you can help them to notice when they are being negative to increase their self-awareness. This must be preceded by a conversation such as in Tip #2 in order to land effectively. Also, be sure to find a confidential space to address their behavior so they don't feel like they are being shamed in front of the group.

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4. **Give consequences.** If you receive resistance from the employee to making positive changes, you may want to clue them into the potential consequences of their behaviors. People tend to respond more strongly to potential losses than potential gains. Let them know what they stand to lose if they continue to spread toxicity.
5. **Call your EAP.** If you need external support, consult with an EAP Clinical Account Executive, available at 1-800-777-4114. We can provide coaching to help you find some clarity and make decisions about your next steps.

### The Final Straw

Of course, there are always going to be employees who are unable or unwilling to change their behaviors. Christine Porath, an associate professor at Georgetown and the author of *Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace*, found in her research that “4% of people engage in this kind of behavior just because it’s fun and they believe they can get away with it.” These extreme cases warrant a higher-level consideration that you won’t be able to fix this problem and may need to respond more seriously.

If an employee shows you that they can’t or won’t change, it may be time to let them go. Toxic employees can be extremely detrimental to the workplace. A Harvard Business School study found that “even relatively modest levels of toxic behavior can cause major organizational cost, including customer loss, loss of employee morale, increased turnover, and loss of legitimacy among important external stakeholders.”

Don’t let one toxic employee bring the entire group down, use these tips to address concerning behavior or it could cost you and your organization dearly.

#### References:

<https://hbr.org/2016/10/how-to-manage-a-toxic-employee>

[https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/16-057\\_d45c0b4f-fa19-49de-8f1b-4b12fe054fea.pdf](https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/16-057_d45c0b4f-fa19-49de-8f1b-4b12fe054fea.pdf)