

Working Positively with Negative People

We all deal with negative people in the workplace, which can make a difficult job even more frustrating. While your tendency might be to avoid them, this is often impossible in a team environment. What if you're required to cooperate with negative people, and your performance is affected adversely by them? First, you can minimize potential problems by understanding what motivates people who are negative. You can also develop a strategy to enhance their value to the team. The following tips will help make these employees more productive in a positive way.

Look Below the Surface

There is often a painful history behind the person who has a negative outlook. Personal suffering is a hallmark of people harboring pent-up anxieties and resentment. It's tempting to jump to the conclusion that negative people are intentionally trying to be unreasonable. In reality, they find the potential downfall in every endeavor because they are no strangers to defeat. They have learned that life is easier when they prepare for the worst, rather than raising their hopes unnecessarily.

Pessimists are normally very vocal about what will not work. Why? Often, it is because they want to protect others from their familiar companion—disappointment. When you find yourself becoming impatient with negative individuals, remember this important lesson, and have compassion on them: *where there is negativity, there is pain.*

Don't Try to Talk Them Out of It

Your noble efforts to convince negative people that "things aren't so bad" will not work. In fact, trying to balance their negativity with positive statements presents an unexpected challenge to pessimistic individuals. They now must persuade you to understand their point of view. Their mission to enlighten you with their sense of reality is only intensified at this point.

Rather than provoke a debate, allow them to express their views. Then explain your perspective using hard facts—not emotion—to make your case.

Focus on Solving Problems

Negative people are a paralyzing force. They are famous for making comments, such as "That will never work," or "The boss won't agree to that in a million years." Negative

people can completely shut down enthusiasm, creativity, and positive energy.

The most effective strategy is to break down a problem into smaller components and shift the focus to individual solutions. Who knows? The negative employee may even feel challenged to join in on finding a solution.

Let Them Identify Potential Pitfalls

A talent for finding possible problems or pitfalls can be an asset to your team. Since negative people have plenty of practice spotlighting what could go wrong, use this to your advantage. Even though most of the setbacks they foresee will not happen, it may be helpful to be prepared in case of unexpected consequences.

A negative person may balance employees on the opposite end of the spectrum. Quite often, optimistic people are somewhat impulsive. They rush into things with an abundance of enthusiasm and a shortage of analysis. Listening to cautionary tales of those with somewhat less optimism can allow you or your work group to be prepared for many obstacles.

Don't Rush Them

Negative people have strong perfectionist tendencies. Their belief systems revolve around fear of mistakes, unexpected bumps in the road, and failure. This is why they focus so intently on what can go wrong and resign themselves to the worst-case scenario.

Making snap decisions is very unsettling to the perfectionist. Give these employees enough time to consider solutions so the fear factor is less of an influence on their contributions. Allowing them time to ponder solutions on their own works more effectively than putting them on the spot.

Turn Negativity into "Positivity"

Although negativity can be challenging, a resourceful person will find a way not only to work with them positively, but also to bring out the best in them. It is possible to turn negative energy into positive action! **CM**

About the Author

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