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Tips for Managing Hostile Employees

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A hostile work environment can be poisonous to productivity, morale and teamwork. It is imperative to use specific conflict resolution techniques to help alleviate hostility within the workplace. But understanding when to intervene and practice conflict management can be tricky; you must first recognize the signs of a hostile employee.

A hostile employee is defined as a person who generates tension, has frequent outbursts, interrupts workflow and refuses to cooperate with coworkers and executives. This person might demonstrate disruptive work habits and have poor performance. This type of hostile behavior is toxic to the entire staff and should be addressed immediately. Tips for managing hostile employees include:

Separate the Employee from their Personality

Mentally separate the person's professional role from their difficult personality. Try to focus on their professional contributions and do not, under any circumstances, engage in arguments or allow your buttons to be pushed. Your ultimate goal is to get this employee to be productive and contribute to the team, not to argue back-and-forth.

It's Professional, Not Personal

The employee could be having professional or personal issues that you know nothing about, so try to remember that **their difficult demeanor might have very little to do with you personally**. Approaching a conflict in this manner could help you not become overly stressed or emotional.

Remember to Listen

One of the key elements to conflict resolution is listening. If you see that anger is escalating, **try to just listen and not interject your opinion or comments.** The employee will appreciate your full attention and feel like you are acknowledging their thoughts and feelings. The employee will likely want to hear what you or others have to say.

Mirror the Conversation

Keeping communication clear is imperative to finding a correct solution for the issue. A useful conflict resolution technique is to **mirror the conversation back to the employee.** For instance, the following is a mirroring statement: *"So, if I understand correctly, it sounds like you're saying we need to assign more people to the project."*

When you mirror (or paraphrase), it lets the employee know you are on the same page and gives the employee a platform to correct anything that might have been misunderstood. **Mirroring helps eliminate confusion.**

Avoid a Stalemate

If a solution cannot be immediately determined, say something like, *"We don't have to decide this today."* **This provides closure for the moment and gives you both a chance to think about a solution**. It also helps refocus the employee and get them back to being productive.

Say Little and Don't Repeat Yourself

Reduce your message to as few words as possible. Try to focus on the quality of your message, rather than the quantity of your words. Also, don't repeat yourself. Repeating what you've said over and over again, even if said in a different way each time, undermines the message and can irritate the employee further. **Say it one time and be done.**

Have an Open Door Policy

Be approachable. An office can host a variety of different personality types, so employees need to know that you have an open door policy and that you welcome their feedback. This conflict management technique **helps keep the lines of communication open and employees more at ease**. It also expedites the resolution process; the issue can be discussed immediately and get everyone back to work.

Editor's Note: Managing Hostile Employees

Like all conflict resolution techniques, to be more comfortable managing hostile employees often requires changing our own conflict habits, managing our emotional triggers, and increasing our emotional intelligence. It's

well worth the investment of time and energy. Unless we learn to manage ourselves, it is virtually impossible to manage anyone else.

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