How to Keep Negativity from Infecting Your Workplace

Dealing with Whiners, Pessimists, Bullies, & Other “Downers”

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TOPICS for TODAY

★ Is Your Workplace Contaminated?
★ What Causes Negative Behavior?
★ Recognizing Your “Negativity Carriers”
★ How Managers Unwittingly Encourage Negativity
★ Six Tools for Neutralizing Negativity
★ Surviving in a Toxic Organization

NEGATIVITY INFECTIONS

Is Your Workplace Contaminated?
NEGATIVITY

Any verbal or non-verbal behavior that causes others to feel upset, depressed, anxious, discouraged, or hopeless

7 Symptoms of a Negativity Infection

- Informal conversations include a lot of griping.
- Employees seldom laugh, joke, or celebrate.
- Meetings and discussions quickly take on a negative tone.
- People often question the motives of others.
- Coworkers become easily annoyed or irritated with one another.
- Managers hear a lot of complaints from employees.
- Office events are poorly attended.
NEGATIVITY INFECTIONS

The Hidden Costs of Negativity

- Emotional contagion
- Reduced motivation
- Lower productivity
- Absenteeism
- Turnover

CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

What Causes Negative Behavior?
CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

**Diagnosing the Cause**

- Problematic personality traits
- Career setbacks & obstacles
- Resistance to change
- Management actions

*Change = Loss*
CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

What have they lost?

- Meaning & Purpose
- Control
- Competence
- Relationships
- Safety & Security

NEGATIVITY CARRIERS

Recognizing Your “Negativity Carriers”
NEGATIVITY CARRIERS

People who promote negativity . . .

- Whiners & Complainers
- Constant Critics
- Tattletales & Gossips
- Rabble-rousers
- Office Bullies
- Gloomy Pessimists
- Stealth Attackers

#1 Whiners & Complainers

Talk at great length about whatever is making them unhappy at the moment

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#2 Constant Critics

Point out the errors or flaws in others’ work, but never admit mistakes of their own

#3 Tattletales & Gossips

Love to “spread the news” with little regard for whether it is actually true
#4 Rabble-rousers

Try to get people “stirred up” about anything they think is wrong or unfair

#5 Office Bullies

Intimidate others by becoming verbally – and sometimes physically – aggressive
#6 Gloomy Pessimists

Consistently point out potential negative outcomes of any action or decision

#7 Stealth Attackers

Appear positive when talking with management, but try to stir up trouble behind the scenes
How Managers Unwittingly Encourage Negativity

Quick Quiz: Do you encourage negative behavior?

- I often get tired of listening to complaining employees.
- I am frequently surprised when employees get upset about changes.
- Some of my employees are chronic tattletales.
- I openly share all management information with employees.
- I sometimes find myself joining employee gossip sessions.
- Employees often wander into my office to gripe about things.
- I try to share my honest feelings with employees.
- I often don’t have time to prepare employees for upcoming changes.
- I have some employees who closely monitor their coworkers.
- I would like to discourage negative behavior, but I don’t know how.
Negativity Pitfalls for Managers

- Tolerating negative behavior
- Using the wrong “reward equation”
- Joining the “complainer chorus”
- Failing to filter information
- Poor change management

Six Strategies for Neutralizing Negativity
Strategies for Neutralizing Negativity

- Behavioral Coaching
- Motivational Levers
- Career Goals
- Listening Posts
- Team Turnaround
- Coaches & Facilitators

Goal

To help an employee change specific negative behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Steps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Educate the employee about the problem</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have a two-way discussion about change</td>
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<td>• Agree on action plans &amp; follow up</td>
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**The 5-Step Behavioral Coaching Process**

**Your Perspective**
- Share your observations
- Explain need for change

**Two-way Discussion**
- Discuss causes & barriers
- Agree on strategies for change
- Provide ongoing feedback

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**Examples**

**Invitation to Change**

- **Complainers:** “I’ve noticed that you seem to spend a lot of time complaining about things that make you unhappy. Your coworkers find this very depressing, so in the future, I need for you to keep these negative thoughts to yourself. However, if you have problems that I can help with, please let me know.”

- **Critics:** “When other people present ideas or proposals, you immediately start talking about why they won’t work. Although you often make some good points, this quick criticism tends to discourage creative thinking, so I need you to look for the possible benefits of an idea before you attack it.”

- **Bullies:** “You often become verbally aggressive with people in meetings. In a professional work environment, it is not acceptable to yell or insult people, so if you want to have a career here, this needs to change immediately.”
Examples

Invitation to Change

• **Rabble-rousers:** “When you are upset about something, you often become quite vocal with your coworkers and get them upset as well. This is very disruptive, so when you have a problem or concern, I need for you to bring it to me first to see if we can work it out.”

• **Stealth Attackers:** “I understand that you’ve been saying some very negative things about our new product line. I was surprised, because I’ve never heard you express those concerns. In the future, I would appreciate it if you would bring these issues directly to me so that we can discuss them.”

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**Using Motivational Levers**

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<th>Steps</th>
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| *To reduce negativity by increasing job satisfaction* | • Find out what is missing in the employee’s job  
• Determine if job changes are feasible  
• Make job change contingent upon behavior change |
### Common Motivators

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>• Achievement</strong></th>
<th>Challenging tasks, clear goals, specific projects, success measures</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• Interaction</strong></td>
<td>Friendly relationships, frequent interaction, time for discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• Creativity</strong></td>
<td>Varied tasks, new ideas, different approaches, brainstorming</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Making decisions, directing others, leading projects, autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• Service</strong></td>
<td>Helping others, working for a cause, fulfilling a purpose, living their values</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• Problem-solving</strong></td>
<td>Complex problems, mental stimulation, demonstrating expertise</td>
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### MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

#### Exploring Career Goals

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To help employees see that their negative behavior is self-defeating</td>
<td>• Learn about the employee’s work-related goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Show how negative behavior could keep them from reaching their goals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Agree on strategies for change</td>
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Creating Listening Posts

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<th>Steps</th>
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<tr>
<td>To provide opportunities for employees to tell you about their concerns</td>
<td>• Have regular interaction with employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Allow time to discuss issues, concerns, &amp; rumors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increase listening during periods of change</td>
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Listening Methods

😊 “Management by walking around”
😊 Regular staff meetings
😊 Eating lunch with employees
😊 Interaction with remote employees
😊 Skip-level meetings
😊 Group listening sessions & retreats
😊 Questions on index cards
😊 Employee surveys & focus groups
😊 Anonymous complaint channels

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Team Turnaround

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<th>Steps</th>
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| To change the negative culture of a work group | • Enlist the entire group in becoming a better team  
• Take a “gap analysis” approach  
• Provide feedback & follow-up |

Set aside specific time for a “team turnaround” meeting.

Take the group offsite if possible. Consider using a facilitator.

Describe your concerns in terms of business problems.

Engage the group in defining the kind of team they want to be.

Conduct a “gap analysis” with the team.

Agree on specific action steps and a feedback plan.

Assess progress during regular meetings.
Coaches & Facilitators

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To resolve serious issues that are beyond the manager’s capabilities</td>
<td>• Recognize when a problem exceeds your ability to deal with it</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Locate a professional coach or facilitator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Be sure the consultant is experienced with your type of problem</td>
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TERMINATION

When removing the cause is the only cure

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“Either people choose to change or we can choose to change people.”

Katherine Meyer
11 Signs of a Toxic Organization

1. People try to avoid talking to managers.
2. Management egos need to be stroked constantly.
3. Executives are primarily focused on increasing their power or pay.
4. Ongoing power struggles consume a lot of time and energy.
5. Entire departments are at war with each other.
6. Gossip, blaming, and back-biting are common among coworkers.
7. More attention is given to what’s wrong than what’s right.
8. Problems automatically trigger the search for a scapegoat.
9. A lot of energy is spent on CYA activities.
10. Disagreements become personal and insulting.
11. No consideration is given to personal or family needs.

Strategies for Staying Sane

- Emotionally detach. Don’t allow it to matter. Keep it out of your head.
- Lower your expectations. It’s not going to change.
- Do what’s required at work, but save your energy for job-seeking.
- Do not get sucked into unproductive games.
- Avoid spending unnecessary time with negative people.
- Find social support outside of work.
- Use effective stress management techniques.
- Focus on the future. And get out of there.
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