

Adjust negative attitudes with employee coaching

Some negative employees constantly complain, criticize, judge, and never seem to be happy. Their behavior is not directly harmful to anyone, but their bad mood is generally demoralizing. Disciplining those employees is not the answer, though, because their behavior doesn't really break any workplace rules.

For example, an employee whose negativity manifests in undermining her supervisor and refusing work orders is deserving of discipline for insubordination. However, an employee whose negativity shows in his habitual whining about work, yet still listens to his supervisor and completes work assignments, is not insubordinate.

Get employees to evaluate their way of thinking. Their normal behavior is to automatically complain, criticize, and make judgments. They should ask themselves:

- Did anyone ask what I thought about the situation or person?
- Am I helping the company by complaining/criticizing/judging?
- Does the complaint/criticism/judgment help my department, co-workers, or manager?
- Will the complaining/criticizing/judging help the person I'm speaking to?
- Will the complaint/criticism/judgment help the person it is about?

If they find that their complaints, criticism, and judgment serve no purpose to anyone, even themselves, then that's exactly where they should keep all of that — to themselves. Explain to the employees that it's okay to not agree with a project deadline, managerial move, co-worker's personality, etc., but complaining, criticizing, or judging won't change anything.

In your one-on-one meetings with the employee, focus on the positive. Start the conversation by asking the employee to tell you two things that went right in her job this week, or one thing she enjoyed doing and was proud to be a part of. Challenge a negative employee to tell you what she wants to do more of, or what would make her work enjoyable and fulfilling.

Give employees advice on how to change their tendency to complain, criticize, and judge.

To change their negative feelings and attitude toward others, they need to change or distance themselves from the information or people contributing to their negativity.

Information may influence employees to be negative, so they need to change their daily intake of information or balance it with an equal amount of positive information and activities.

Example: An employee reads the newspaper in the morning and gets a daily dose of bad news. It's easy to tell him to stop reading the paper, but that might be part of a morning routine and a hard habit to break. So he should counter that intake of negative information with a positive activity, such as sitting down for breakfast with his children before they go off to school or going out for a quick jog to boost his energy.

Rather than, or in addition to, information, a person might be contributing to employees' negativity. That person could be anyone from an unfriendly coffee shop clerk to a temperamental co-worker. They should limit their interaction with that person or avoid them all together, if possible.

Teach employees to focus on the "bright side," rather than what's wrong with a person or situation.

Right now, it's easy for them to focus on the negative, so focusing on the positive will be tough in the beginning. Reminding them of the "bright side" when negative comments come out of their mouth will help them to refocus on the positive. With practice and over time, they will naturally see the bright side.