

# Temper tantrums, door slamming: It's not about teenagers and 2-year-olds

**Question:** There are three administrative assistants in my office, including myself. One of them is the office perfectionist who gets upset with others, including the administration and her own manager, if they do not do things "just the way and when" she thinks they should.

She also gets upset when her manager interacts with me. I do work for "her" manager as well as the other managers in our offices, so there are times when we must interact. She is very stern and serious, and I am a little frightened of her temper.

When she gets upset with someone she slams her office door and leaves it closed for the day. I did not want to approach her because I did not want to deal with her anger and harshness. When she gets in this bad mood I stay away from her. I feel like it is "her problem" and she needs to get a grip. The door slamming is disruptive and upsetting for others and very unprofessional behavior. - *Anonymous*.

## Comments

It seems there is always one admin. who want to fix someone's behavior when it should be up to their supervisor to deal with the problem. What about the other people who find this disruptive? What are they doing? If her supervisor lets her get away with this, I would just ignore her as you are doing when she is in her funk. If you have a good HR Manager, you could ask for advice for dealing with this. Other than that, I would just be the most professional, competent and well balanced admin. I could be. She will dig her own grave eventually.

**Posted by: Karen Kosmoski | June 29, 2007 at 05:44 PM**

If her manager is not going to say anything about her rude and disruptive behavior I guess there is really not too much anyone else can do. Maybe you could suggest to your manager that an hydraulic door closer be installed on her office door. She wouldn't be able to slam the door then. I would also like to say, don't be afraid of her temper. When she gets like that, think of her as a big blow fish and just say to yourself "whatever". If she starts throwing things - duck!

**Posted by: Janet Blehrud | June 29, 2007 at 05:49 PM**

What's your question?

**Posted by: | June 29, 2007 at 06:18 PM**

First off, immediately go to personnel about the aggressive behavior - especially if it makes you afraid. I had a VP who got angry in a meeting and kept slamming his fist on the table as he yelled to the point where I also felt "unsafe." I told personnel and he was warned about his behavior. (Personnel took it very seriously.)

Next, tell someone in management - your boss, her boss, etc. - that this is very upsetting to you (and others, if applicable). The company has more to lose here than you think when they have a "renegade" employee like this. The company, by remaining ideal, is risking that someone might leave and file suit against them for a "hostile work environment."

Now, even after doing one or both of the above, you do have the advantage here and might try one other thing. On a day when you're feeling fed up with this person's behavior, approach her and say, "You obviously don't like working here because you get so upset all the time. Why don't you put yourself first and find another job that makes you happy?" What's the worse that can happen? She slams a door and hides in her office all day? I took this approach when working with an employee who was miserable to be around. Guess what? She resigned the next day and thanked me for pointing out her unhappiness. (Turns out this woman was very upset about her new responsibilities and her way of dealing with them was to take her frustration out on everyone else!) Maybe your coworker is having a personal issue that you don't know about and this is the cause of her outbursts. Maybe she has no control over her own life and controlling things at work is the only outlet she has to get this type of satisfaction. Granted, that's no excuse for her behavior, but thinking about what's behind the situation might make you feel a little better the next time she acts up. Good luck!

**Posted by: Cindy Brock | June 30, 2007 at 09:15 AM**

First off I think it is terrific you actually have doors to shut...most administrative assistants do not. So if she shuts her door, whats wrong with your door? Doesn't it work? There is something fishy with this story. If it is really a true problem, document, document document. When you get enough documentation, pass it on to HR or "her" boss. Be prepared to look for new employment. The world is not a fair place. I'd look anyway.

**Posted by: Carol Walery | June 30, 2007 at 09:14 PM**

I am the front desk receptionist/AA who also serves 2 managers and the CEO. She is specific to the financial department. I do not have a door to close. (At my previous job I was an AA with an office space and doors.) The weird thing about her tantrums is that the very next day she is nice and calm and professional again. (Until things build up after a couple weeks and she has another tantrum.) I sense that she feels bad after these outbursts and is hoping everyone else forgets when she has one. I believe that she is not happy here (thus the Dr. Jekle and Ms. Hyde), and will eventually move on. I think part of her behavior has aspects of "bullying". Since she does her work so timely and well, her tantrums are overlooked I think.

**Posted by: | July 02, 2007 at 08:29 AM**

She has a door?! I have been an office assistant for 35 years and I have never had a door. Wow! Anyway . . . I digress. Fred Pryor Seminars has many workshops to deal with stress at work and to deal with difficult people. If you see any I would put the flyer on her desk as a subtle hint. If you hear nothing regarding it and she keeps on put another one on her desk. We had a person who had constant outbursts of anger and I did this and after a while it stopped. Maybe she just doesn't realize what she is doing?

**Posted by: Jo Ann | July 02, 2007 at 09:35 AM**

You mention "Dr. Jekle and Ms. Hyde". She may either be doing this on purpose as a learned behavior or she may have an emotional problem that she cannot control on her own.

1. If you feel safe about doing this, you might consider talking to her about how you enjoy the good aspects of behavior. A comment may be, "I like it how Jane calmly handled that". Or, "it's great to work with the professionals on our staff". Thus, you are encouraging the good behavior.

2. When the waters are turbulent, I agree - ignore the behavior and document, document, document. Then, contact your HR Department. And, it is always a good idea to keep your resume current while periodically looking at other jobs.

**Posted by: | July 02, 2007 at 09:43 AM**

Where every you go, there is going to be difficult co-workers of various kinds and degrees. (Some behaviors can be effectively ignored.) Her periodic bad behavior is not causing me to consider alternative employment. It seems best to ignore the door slamming and just stay away from her when she is in that mode.

**Posted by: | July 02, 2007 at 11:10 AM**

Ms. Perfectionist needs to reassess her behavior, but probably doesn't know how bad it is. I like the idea of leaving seminar information on her desk relating to that issue. Maybe she will get the hint. When she asks who is leaving it tell her it was you and when she wants to talk about it have a very professional well memorized sentence to "make your statement". Having worked for a kindergarten teacher who was VERY effective in controlling bad behavior she has taught me an invaluable lesson that I have used on children and adults, it works. Maybe a non-accusatory, factual statement like, "when you get upset your behavior is having a negative impact on those around you". STOP, say nothing more. When she goes to justify or excuse herself and stops for a reply, repeat the exact words in a softer tone without adding any other words. You may have to say this 3-4 times before she "hears" it and drops it. Then when the situation happens again, leave a copy of the seminar on her desk prepared to have her confront you and calmly yet firmly say the exact same words and if necessary go thru the repetition. It sounds very primary, yet it is SO effective. Plus, you have not gotten pulled into a war of words and can't be accused of nothing more then stating the facts. Document each of these encounters, keep a copy and mail the original to yourself and do not open. The postmark will be proof that you have not fudged your documentation. Keep these in a file, unopened even after either of you leave the company. Another thing I learned from working for a public school system.

**Posted by: Anonymous in MO | July 02, 2007 at 05:51 PM**

I worked for one such administrator for 5.5 miserable years. I went through all the proper channels (chain of command) three different times and was discounted by upper management every time. I documented, did all the right things. I finally gave up the fight and applied for a promotion in the same company and left. My life is too short and sweet to let someone ruin it for me because they have a power/control problem.

**Posted by: Donna | July 05, 2007 at 12:58 PM**

I am jealous of the fact she has an office! LOL. I am surprised HR hasn't talked to her yet. I know I was in that situation being the one people said has a bad attitude/temper. HR talked to me and I explained the

miscommunications that have been going on. I do not socialize with everyone here as I don't trust everyone I work with but I have been working on my attitude.

Anyone know how to be friendly without being phony??

**Posted by: Angie | July 06, 2007 at 03:15 PM**

I am in the safe situation as we speak. Our supervisor has spoken with the person several times. You can not suggest or correct her on anything. She has a problem with authority. We are all at the point of looking for a new job. Even though we love our work and company some things are not worth it.

My point is, I am still very friendly and professional. I speak and smile when I need to and not any other time to the individual. I do not come across as phony, as it is sincere. I feel sorry for her and that is what I remember when I have to speak.

**Posted by: Undisclosed | July 06, 2007 at 03:45 PM**

Didn't get around to this question last week ... but what if the employee having the tantrum is the owner/president/CEO of the firm throwing phone/computer/etc and having a tantrum?

**Posted by: Anonymous | July 09, 2007 at 10:47 AM**

hasn't the supervisor or director spoke to her about the temper tantrums? If not and you feel it is becoming a hostile work environment when she explodes I would send a formal complaint. Co-Workers should not have to put up with immature antics by an adult you are not in daycare but a work environment. Good luck

**Posted by: | July 10, 2007 at 11:52 AM**

Keep an accurate report on these behaviors and report it to the Human Resource Department. This is part of their job.

If enough complaints are reported, a responsible HR Director will call a meeting with that person and should provide a verbal warning and so on.

This is disruptive behavior and should not be tolerated in an office or anywhere. Maybe some anger management classes could be offered to individuals with those behaviors.

No one should have to work in hostile conditions and proper reporting to higher department heads just may be the trick.

Remember that you should remain courteous and professional at all times and in all situations.

Good Luck.

**Posted by: Victoria Grady | July 13, 2007 at 02:33 PM**