

Strategies For Overcoming Negative Attitudes In the Workplace

Negativity spreads like a virus through the workplace, causing low morale, high tension, and greater dissatisfaction, which can all lead to an increase in turnover. Just one or two negative employees can disrupt the workplace to the point where they create an overall negative environment for other employees. Their attitude manifests in behaviors such as constant complaining, bad-mouthing, and hostility, and can be contagious if allowed to spread.

In order to change the mood of the workplace, you must address negativity on an organizational level, as well as an individual level.

Overall Negativity

Management can be directly responsible for creating or encouraging negativity through their own actions and attitudes. Therefore, your efforts at nixing negativity from your workplace should begin at the top.

Here are some strategies you and your managers can use to discourage negativity among employees.

- Set an example by keeping your communications positive. Try countering negative statements by pointing out a positive. This may spur more positive thinking from others. Don't give employees the impression that it is acceptable to act negatively by allowing them to constantly criticize or display defeat without intervening and providing a positive spin on their statements. Example: When employees say, "There's no way we can get this done on time," counter that with, "Let's figure out how we can get this done by the due date."
- Expect positive actions from employees. Encourage them to resolve conflict, rather than just gripe about it and be complacent. Evaluate employees on their interpersonal skills. If they know they are being evaluated on how well they get along, collaborate, and cooperate with co-workers, they may be less likely to exhibit negative behavior.
- Don't indulge constant complainers. Turn it into a problem-solving discussion instead. Get them to take action by asking for their suggestions, and give strong consideration to what they say. If you don't end up using their suggestions, explain why and thank them for the input. By doing so, you've shown you take them seriously and encouraged them to take an active approach to problem solving instead of just complaining.
- Don't pay too much attention to negative employees. You don't want to "reward" negative employees with your attention (even if it's negative attention, some individuals thrive on it). You also don't want to risk making your more positive employees feel neglected because you're spending so much time and energy trying to rein in the negativity. Show your gratitude to employees who have a good attitude.
- Give positive recognition often. Feedback should not be mostly critical; accolades are equally important. Constant criticism and negative feedback breed negativity. Therefore, it is important that you remind employees that their contributions make a difference to the department's success.
- Get direct feedback from employees on how to make the workplace more enjoyable, less tense, etc. Consider using a suggestion box or anonymous survey. By utilizing employees' ideas on what gives them

job satisfaction, you may be able to turn their negative feelings about their jobs into positive ones.

Individual Negativity

Take these steps to address a specific employee's negative behavior.

- Hold a meeting with the employee and point out the specific behaviors and their effect on the workplace. For example, he constantly complains, which turns off his co-workers and they avoid working with him; she produces slipshod work because she doesn't care, and her mistakes cause more work for her co-workers.
- Ask questions to determine whether there is something in the work environment that is troubling or frustrating the employee. The idea is to get his/her side of the story before proceeding. Then, work toward a solution. Give goals, with a timeline and consequences.
- Inform the employee that it is in his/her best interests to change the behavior immediately, and if you don't see immediate and sustained improvement, you will begin the disciplinary process. Also let the employee know that failure to change inappropriate behavior is a terminable offense.
- Follow through on what you say. Employees' negative attitudes will continue if tolerated without any consequences. It might take suspending or terminating an employee in order for the rest to get the message that you are serious about nixing negativity in the workplace.

These tips will help you get started in addressing negativity in your workplace. But negativity can be an ongoing problem and may take much time and effort to eliminate it from your workplace entirely.