Managing the workplace martyr

Martyrs are willing to take things on and sacrifice for the team—and boy, do they let everyone else know it. While on the surface, such employees seem like a dream, they can be problematic. Here’s how:

**They don’t know their limits.** They take on too much and burn out fast. Additionally, they often produce shoddy work, and other co-workers lose faith in their ability to do the job well.

**They complain ... often.** They are quick to whine about an overwhelming, unfair workload, even as they volunteer to take on more assignments. Co-workers are forced to feel guilty, but when they offer to help, the martyr shoots them down.

**They come to work sick.** That is not a quality you want in an employee. When they sacrifice their own health to come into work, they risk making everyone else sick.

**They are often control freaks.** They don’t trust anybody, and believe that no one can do the job as well as they can.

What should you do if a martyr works for you? Follow this advice:

**Delegate more strategically and fairly.** You should know what all your employees are working on and have a pretty good sense of their overall workloads. Make sure that you aren’t overloading any one person—or relying on the martyr too much.

**Praise and incentivize teamwork, rather than individual effort.** That discourages individuals from doing too much on their own, just because they want to prove themselves or beat out “the competition.”

**Celebrate collaboration.** Martyrs often “go it alone,” because they want to show everyone just how much they can do all by themselves. Tell employees that collaboration and teamwork are important, so much so that they will be considered during performance evaluations.