

Get an aloof employee to collaborate

You encourage teamwork among your staff, but no amount of preaching will help if certain workers relish their independence, bear grudges against co-workers or fear being left out when it's time to roll the credits.

To win them over, meet with them privately and ask four questions:

1. How do you rate your job? Gauge how well the employee is satisfied. If he bellyaches about his role, low pay or other problems, don't expect more team involvement to improve his attitude.

Propose a deal: Suggest ways to make his job better in exchange for his collaboration. For example, give him a small budget to test his ideas on the condition that he actively contribute half his time to team projects.

2. How does your job affect others? Help the employee appreciate how others depend on him and vice versa—even if he views himself as a lone wolf. Show how the system can break down if he drops the ball. This way, he'll understand that he's already part of a team.

3. Who helps you do your job? When a leave-me-alone worker sees that much of his success flows from other people's efforts, he may grow less aloof. Identify those who enable him to function effectively: a marketer who sells his product, an HR manager who helps him hire staff or a network administrator who troubleshoots his computer.

Say, "These folks see you as part of their team. Just as they support you, isn't it fair that you support them?"

4. Who can provide more help? Discuss with the employee which colleagues can make his job easier. After he lists a few, say, "Great. Let's talk to them about chipping in more. Let's also think about how you can chip in for them."

When to give in

In some cases it's wise to indulge loners. Forcing them onto a team can harm their productivity and drag down the group's morale. Here's how to tell:

1. Defer to specialists. You wouldn't put a brilliant scientist who conducts valuable experiments on a team of beginners who will slow her progress. If a star employee insists on being left alone to produce measurable results, say yes.

2. Listen to dissenters. If a bright, well-intentioned employee disagrees with the team's direction, keep an open mind. He may be right.