

Dealing with difficult team members: the PITAs

Anybody can lead people who are hardworking, pleasant, thoughtful, respectful and fun. The true challenge is whether you can handle PITAs, which stands for either Pains In The Ass or Professionals Increasing Their Awareness, depending on how kind you are.

Here are a few types of PITAs and how best to lead them:

- **Crusty PITAs** are negative, crabby, pessimistic, cynical and may be mean-spirited. Don't take what these grouches say personally and don't enable or encourage their crankiness, but don't write them off, either. Instead, pick your battles and meet with them one-on-one.
- **Sealed PITAs** are closed off and defensive. Be kind, emotionally even and hold your ground in providing feedback.
- **Overstuffed PITAs** are glory hounds, always full of themselves. Give these blowhards lots of praise, explain that your feedback is designed to make them even greater, and remember that they're more fragile than they seem.
- **Soggy PITAs** are whiny, high-maintenance, needy and afraid of confrontation. Your soggy PITAs will complain about other people being high-maintenance, and you will have to try not to laugh. Express lots of caring and concern for your soggy people, but don't let them sop up other employees' time.
- **Royal PITAs** are prima donnas. These characters think the sun rises and sets on them, and expect big, exciting jobs with huge payoffs right now. You won't get a whole lot of empathy here. Politely challenge your royal employees' misperceptions, reinforce that can-do attitude and talk to them if they insult other employees or otherwise cross the line.
- **Sloppy PITAs** are disorganized and oblivious. You may love them, but they're all over the place, imprecise and inattentive to details. Push past their popularity and guide them with clear, detailed directions. Hold them to schedules and outcomes.

The gyro—the original sloppy pita—is the perfect manifestation of your possibly fabulous employee who often makes a big mess. No matter how determined you are to hold it together, the gyro always wins as you curse and grab for the napkins.

— Adapted from *The PITA Principle*, Robert Orndorff and Dulin Clark, JIST Works.