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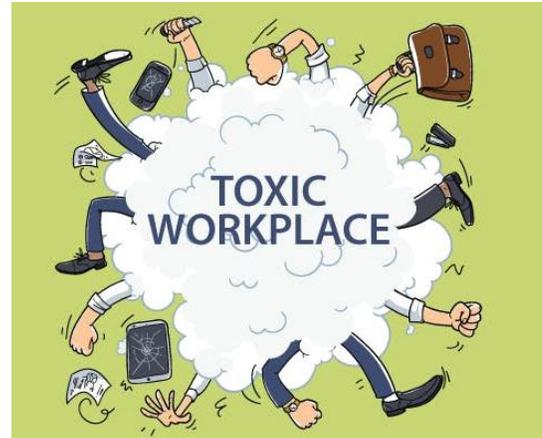
What is Toxic Behavior in the Work Environment?



A lot of us work in competitive environments and sometimes, we work with colleagues who make us feel confused, anxious or angry when we deal with such co-workers. You speak to them and you feel disrespected, put down and sometimes you even feel like “you’re walking on eggshells’ as you interact with them.

Sound familiar?

You know the less dealings you have with such “toxic employees” the better it is for you emotionally and physically. But sometimes you have to deal with such colleagues. According to Bush (2017) a toxic employee is someone who has a “pervasive and ingrained pattern of dysfunctional thoughts and feelings that contribute to behaviors that are destructive not only for themselves but for others. Often employees who exhibit toxic behaviors are not aware of their negative behaviors and its impact on others. Sometimes if the “toxic employee” is okay about it- confronting them in a constructive manner like “It’s not helpful to say all of you are annoying” can be viewed positively by the colleague exhibiting such behaviors. But sometimes such co-workers may react defensively-like “I never said this.” Even if they view your statement as critique about themselves, the co-worker can resort to bullying the person(s) who expressed this critique... and sometimes the bullying may have to do with the co-workers’ position in the company.





How to Identify Colleagues Who Exhibit Toxic Behavior

Here are some ways to recognize toxic behaviors- generally these are behaviors that are exhibited over a period of time by a person exhibiting such behavior:

1. The person sees each assignment as a hurdle to complete - lacks motivation
2. The person manages time indiscriminately – missing deadlines, inefficient work habits – disorganized – wastes time doing other things online
3. The person takes off from work – being absent a great deal – takes a lot of sick days or comes to work sick
4. The person creates a drama in the office – makes things more complicated than they should be- loud and distracting
5. Everything is seen as a struggle – complains often – lacks credibility amongst colleagues – disregards protocol – bullies others
6. Person may constantly say when a suggestion is made...”it won’t work” or “we’ve already tried this” or “I don’t like doing it this way”

Do you know colleagues who exhibit toxic behaviors?

There are other not so obvious ways to notice behavior in the office that is toxic to the work environment according to Pavlou.

1. **The gossip** – “did you hear about who’s getting a promotion?”
Gossip in the office leads to a decrease in work productivity if too much of this is done. This behavior becomes toxic when “the gossip” is preoccupied only with such stories. One can say let’s talk about this during lunch or after work.

2. **The yes-person** –“yes that sounds great, if you say so”
This is a team member who always agrees with everyone at the end of department meetings – never initiating – nor bringing new ideas to the conversation - nor willing to learn. They put the minimum effort into their jobs – doing only what is expected of them – nothing more. Talk to them and find out why they are so disengaged and lack enthusiasm. Reach out to them.
3. **The procrastinator** – “I’ll do it tomorrow”
If you are a manager, be well-defined in your responsibilities and their timelines. Praise people on your team for their efforts and show positive interest when members of your team think through a problem creatively.
4. **The excuse-maker** – “that’s not my job”
This colleague avoids work but unlike the procrastinator who says he/she will do the job, the excuse-maker finds a way to not even do the work- absent from work, lack of motivation are reasons for this. Hold such employees accountable for their assignments by submitting periodic reports.
5. **The narcissist** – “nobody can do what I do”
This colleague is an excellent worker, but doesn’t understand the value of a strong team. This person loves working independently and doesn’t understand that success of the corporation needs cooperation to undertake challenges.
6. **The grump** – “why do things like this happen all the time”
This is the colleague who complains about everything all the time. Speak to them and understand what they want.
7. **The sage** – “I know it all”
This is the colleague who has an answer for everything, who won’t accept nor listen to another perspective nor any feedback. If employees refuse to listen to critique, they build walls against new ideas and solutions. Incorporate workplace training sessions on civility and collegiality – so that “the sage” can think “out of the box.”
If you are the supervisor, observation, feedback in a constructive manner and coaching are the tools for dealing with behavior that is toxic.

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