Take Another Approach With A Problem Employee



Question: I have an employee who is performing his job adequately, but his attitude and behaviour are a consistent workplace issue. He can be disrespectful, boastful and argumentative. I would not classify him as a bully, but other employees do not want to work with him. He has poor interpersonal skills. I have begun the process of progressive discipline, offering him warnings, and asking him to change his behaviour. Success has been mixed at best. My supervisor says the customers like him, so we do not want to lose him. I am not certain how to proceed.

Changing Behaviour Requires Seeing The Bigger Picture

It is difficult to change an entrenched behaviour, especially when a person is achieving some success. Even if the person tries to hear what you are saying and is willing to try to make changes that does not mean he really gets it or is committed enough to change. If this employee continues to be successful at some level change will be more difficult.

Look Differently At The Situation

Consider the following…

1) The person in question may have a specific personal challenge that makes dealing with workplace change especially difficult. These challenges could be the result of a perceptional/processing challenge (such as ADHD), a mental health issue (such as a mood disorder) or under developed emotional intelligence skills.

2) See the bigger picture. Gather information that goes beyond this individual's performance and look at the entire picture of costs and benefits. You may need to demonstrate to your supervisor that although this person is keeping the customers happy, his actions cost the company elsewhere. Perhaps other employees take more sick days and perform poorer in their own work after an encounter with this disrespectful individual.

3) Another aspect of the big picture is examining your other employees motives and perceptions. Rarely is there only one side to a situation. Differences in generations, cultures, disability and personal styles or even jealousy could be a factor in this situation. All of this information can be informative.

Appeal To His Desire For Continued Success

Try a different approach. Focus on success, not discipline. It may be that he does not recognize the problem because he has some success. Offer to provide him with a mentor or career performance coach to help him improve his ‘all around game’.

TODAY’S EXPERT



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A performance coach could work in cooperation with this employee to analyze his patterns of behaviour and pinpoint ways he can improve his performance. Using techniques including assessments and mindfulness training this employee may be given the opportunity to gain insights into his own behaviours. Often change results from a combination of awareness and the ongoing support. A mentor or coach can suggest specific actions and provide weekly accountability coaching to reinforce behavioural change.

If you only look at your difficult employee’s performance in isolation you may be missing details that tell a different story. With a full story you may have a better chance to find a way to enable change and benefit the entire organization or you may find this employee cannot make it work and it is time to make plans to let him go.