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MANAGING AWAY BAD HABITS

Talented, hard-working, goal-oriented employees are the lifeblood of a successful organization. What do you do, however, when otherwise stellar performers display consistently destructive behavior patterns that limit their effectiveness and make life hard for everyone around them? Everyone has their own quirks, of course, and we can learn to work productively in spite of them. But what about consistent problematic behavior that is not just an occasional foible, but a core aspect of someone's personality that affects all their daily activities and relationships?

People like this pose a real challenge for a manager. Left unchecked, their behavior can hurt co-workers, damage the organization, and sabotage their own careers. You need to intervene—but you want to preserve the potential of an otherwise high-performing employee. What can you do?

Problem behaviors commonly result from a person's inability to perceive the effect their behavior has on others, as well as a poor self-image and difficulty understanding the appropriate use of power, and accepting its use by others. As a manager you can't address the inner psychological issues of such people, but by focusing on performance and behavioral

coaching you can achieve real results for the employee and the organization.

Here are some tips to deal with some common patterns.

THE OVERACHIEVER

Overachievers are hard-driving and goal-oriented, and habitually push themselves and their co-workers to the breaking point. The overachiever will eventually burn out if the pattern continues—and so will their colleagues.

What can you do? Often the overachiever does not realize they are overdoing it till too late, so help them develop a checklist of warning signs. Use reward to encourage moderation and focus on long-term needs, and strongly discourage short-term extremes. If necessary, impose limits on their after-hour demands on subordinates. Help them learn that by good planning they can achieve the results they want without having to give 150%.

THE IDEALIST

The idealist believes in a true meritocracy where good work and sound thinking speak for themselves, and is unable to accept the necessity of real-world politics and compromise.

What can you do? Offer your sympathy with their ideals, but lead them to the question: do you want to be pure, or be effective? Help them recognize and accept the many personal

factors that influence decision-making in practice. Provide them with opportunities for personal effectiveness, so positive reinforcement leads them to a more pragmatic outlook.

THE BULLY

Bullies abuse their authority over those around them—not just by shouting and belittling, but by imposing unrealistic demands or withholding recognition. They often become less effective over time, while the people around them become alienated.

What can you do? Confront them with the effects of their behavior—*Do you know how many enemies you have made?* Provide concrete evidence. If they still resist the need to change, an ultimatum can be motivating! Help them make a list of victims and rank them. Have them script an apology that includes the words "I'm sorry," and have them deliver the apology—first in role-play, then for real. Help them learn to recognize signs of imminent bullying before they happen, and develop alternate tactics.

