

Great Leadership

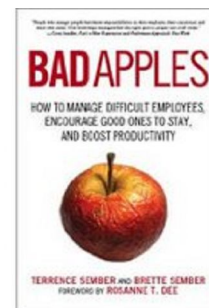
Opinions and information on leadership and leadership development by Dan McCarthy

Friday, July 17, 2009

[Managing Bad Apples Is Key to Productivity](#)

Guest post by Terry Sember:

Bad apples are employees who cause problems, reduce productivity, or have a negative impact on morale. These types of workers come with a variety of traits, personalities and problems. Most managers are well-equipped to handle problems with sales, production, negotiations, or suppliers, but almost universally, managers feel inadequate when it comes to solving personality problems or person-to-person conflicts. And these often have the biggest influence on productivity in the workplace.



Identifying Bad Apples

Some easy to recognize signs of a troublesome employee include tardiness, leaving work early, failing to follow instructions, argumentativeness, and inability to take direction well. The best test for a bad employee is to ask if he negatively affects the company's bottom line. Whatever he is doing (or not doing) can make it harder for other people to get their work done, or for him to complete his. Some types of bad apples include backstabbers, passive-aggressives, liars, bullies, whiners, career climbers, gossips, laziness and more. The ultimate outcome of the employee's attitude or behavior is that the company does not succeed as well as it could have.

Evaluate Productivity

When it comes down to it, employees are primarily valuable to the company because of the work they accomplish which helps the company make money. There may be employees who work for you that you don't like, find annoying, or whom other people dislike, but the ultimate test of whether they are bad apples is how they impact productivity.

You need to look not only at that employee's own productivity, but at how she influences productivity for the entire company. An employee who does not do his job well is an obvious problem, but one that drains the resources of the company from other employees is not as easy to spot sometimes.

Understanding Bad Apple Behavior

Just as there are lots of behavior that qualifies as problematic, there are many reasons that can explain bad apple behavior. If you can pinpoint and understand the reasons behind your employee's actions (or inactions), you'll be in a better position to be able to solve the problem. Some common reasons for below par activity include:

- he doesn't like his job
- he doesn't like the work environment
- she doesn't like her co-workers
- she feels dissatisfied within the company
- he has skill set deficiencies he is trying to manage or cover up
- he really has no idea he's not measuring up
- she is experiencing a personal, health, or family problem outside of work
- he has a basic clash with management
- she has basic personality traits that are just incompatible with the job or company.

The best way to find out the reason behind your employee's behavior is simply to talk to her. Find out what her concerns are, how she feels, and what's going on in her life. It's impossible to properly correct something if you can't identify the cause and sometimes we as managers tend to over think things when there really is a simple explanation. If you have an employee who is not turning in projects on time, you could extrapolate all sorts of complicated reasons for this - she can't work with the new version of the software, she's trying to make you look bad, and so on, when the explanation might be as simple as the fact that another manager is giving her work that is more urgent. Find the root of the problem and you can then fix it. Unless you understand the core cause of the problem, you might end up just solving a symptom, but not resolving the underlying issue. A solution that deals only with the symptoms is going to be an incomplete solution. If you spackle over a cracked wall in your house you can mask the problem, but it will simply crack again if you have a shifting foundation that needs to be repaired. Your employee is in

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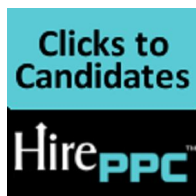
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About Me



Dan McCarthy

I've been a practitioner in the field of leadership development for over 20 years. I'm currently the Manager of Leadership and Management Development at a Fortune "Great Place to Work", "Training Top 125", and "High Impact Learning" (HILLO 80) company. The opinions expressed in this blog are my own and don't represent the views of my current or former employers.

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Ask me a question

E-mail me with your questions on leadership development, leadership issues, crazy bosses, or impossible employees. With your permission, I'd be glad to give you my 2 cents in an upcoming