

Bad Apples: How to Manage Difficult Employees by Terrence Sember was recently released by Adams Media. The book offers practical solutions for common employee problems, such as gossiping, backstabbing, laziness, personality conflicts and more.

This book covers a lot of common problems seen in the workplace. Did you base this on personal experiences?

I've worked in management for over 15 years and have done so in a variety of industries and companies. I've seen a lot of employees and dealt with a lot of problems. What I tried to do is sum up the most common problems managers encounter, and much of it is based on what I have encountered in the workplace.

How common are bad employees?

I think every manager can point to at least one person on the team that is the most difficult. The thing to remember when you are managing is that every employee has his or her own personality which includes assets, and negatives. The smart manager learns how to tap into the assets and minimize the negatives.

*I know this is your second book. The first one, **The Essential Supervisor's Handbook** is a great primer for managers. What kind of specific advice do you offer managers in **Bad Apples**?*

The goal with **Bad Apples: How to Manage Difficult Employees** was to give some practical, hands-on advice for how to solve employee personality problems. So not only do I talk about specific solutions for types of bad employees, but I also offer advice about how to keep the bad employees from negatively affecting your good employees, how to form a team that is less likely to have problems, and how to solve inter-team problems. For example, one common bad apple is the whiner. This kind of behavior can really be distracting for the entire team. Just telling the

person to stop is usually not enough. Instead, I encourage managers to think about *why* that person whines. One frequent reason is that the person feels uninvolved in a process. Get that person involved early enough so he or she can have input – that way there is no reason for whining at later stages.

What do you think is the most difficult part of dealing with a bad apple?

I think for many managers the hardest thing is firing someone. Although this person might be a really bad employee, he or she is still a person with a family and a household. Having to be the bearer of that bad news can be upsetting. Because of this I offer an entire chapter on firing – when to do it, how to protect yourself legally, how to avoid, and what exactly to say and do when you have no alternative. Much of the book however is focused on creating change so aren't put in the position where you have to fire someone.

What do you think is the biggest mistake most managers make?

Most managers function reactively. They wait for a problem to become big and only then, when there is no choice, do they deal with it. A smart manager acts preventively. Spot behavior and attitude problems with employees that are developing and work to find out what is causing them and how to fix them. If one of your good employees suddenly starts missing meetings and coming in late, don't wait for it to become out of control. Instead, sit down and talk with the person. You might find out she and her husband separated and sometimes her son's bus is late in the morning, so she sometimes runs late. If you have this information you can work out a plan with her that allows her to work late one day a week to make up the time. If you don't talk to her, you won't know the cause and instead will be in the position of having to discipline her for tardiness down the line.