Managing Difficult Personalities

& dealing with toxic behaviours at work

Take a seat in the front and middle sections of the hall for the workshop.
Civility
Respect
Regard

NOT NEGOTIABLE
Toxic personalities

“Individuals who demonstrate a pattern of counterproductive work behaviors that debilitate individuals, work teams, and organizations.”

Toxic Personalities at Work: A Call to Action for Leaders, Dr. Mitchell Kusy,
The Three Types of Employees

1. **Engaged** employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

2. **Not-engaged** employees are essentially "checked out." They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time -- but not energy or passion -- into their work.

3. **Actively disengaged** employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-engaged</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively disengaged</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Modes of Management & Leadership

Directive
- I decide
- I tell
- You do
- I’m responsible

Facilitative
- We discuss
- You decide
- You do
- You’re responsible

Staff member

Novice

Expert
Tough Minded &

Tender hearted
Groups of 4

In your experience, what are some of the costs of toxic personalities & behaviours in the workplace?
Quote from the research

Toxic Workplace! Managing Toxic personalities and their systems of power  Kusy & Holloway 2009

‘The day this person left is considered an annual holiday in our organisation!’
...every time. And it can eat leaders too.
Together
Everyone
Achieves
More
Together
Everyone
Annoys Me
Above the Line

Below the Line
Be fun to be with and you will always have people with you.
3 – 5 positives to 1 negative

…..if you want growth and development
“I never criticise a player until they are first convinced of my unconditional confidence in their abilities.”

John Robinson, Football Coach
Don’t try to teach a pig to sing.

It wastes your time and just irritates the pig.
Use the power of positive feedback

• Value contribution
• Catch people doing things right - go out of your way to have positive contacts
• Recognise, recognise, recognise – when people are doing things just as you need them to or in ways that show the values in action
• Informal rewards
Toxic Personalities in the workplace:
Toxic Workplace!: Mitchell Kusy & Elizabeth Holloway

1. **Shaming**  Humiliation, sarcasm, pot shots, temper tantrums, bullying, over critical

2. **Passive hostility**  passive aggressive, very agreeable to your face, works to your detriment behind the scenes, gossip, moody, doesn’t do what they are asked, territorial, martyr

3. **Team Sabotage**  not sharing information, surveillance, withdrawing efforts, usually controlling behaviours,
Why are they hard to spot?

- Some are highly productive
- They keep people off the scent – hard to identify
- Abuse power when in positions of responsibility so often in charge
- Reject negative feedback and project their issues on to others
- Chameleons – Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde
To make it even harder...

• ‘Toxic protectors’
  ■ Special relationship protector
  ■ Expertise protector
  ■ Productivity protector

• ‘Toxic buffers’
  ■ Persons who shield others from the toxic person’s venom
Quote from the research

*Toxic Workplace! Managing Toxic personalities and their systems of power*  Kusy & Holloway 2009

‘This toxic person still remains. They have some protectors in the organisation and have managed to get the ‘truth tellers’ eliminated’
Look for the pattern

- Have you seen this behaviour more than 3 times?
- Are you or them under a lot of stress?
- Have you already had an adult to adult conversation with them?
- Can everyone predict how the difficult person will react?
- Do you find yourself reacting in ways that are uncharacteristic for you to this person?
- Does the climate change when this person is present (or not present)?
Common reactions from leaders

Adjust or leave
• Compromise standards
• Accommodate the behaviour
• Decrease motivation
• Leave

Reconfigure the situation
• Reduce toxic interactions
• Remove responsibilities
• Exclude them from decision making
What to do about it?

- Create strong, positive cultures of civility, respect and regard
- What’s OK? What’s not OK? - set clear standards around important do’s and don’ts then challenge difficult behaviours immediately
- Think systemically – address toxic behaviours at an individual, team, organisational level
- Have clear expectations around leadership: everyone deserves to be well led
- Recognise it is your problem, step up early and address it
ORGANISATIONAL Level

- Create positive cultures
- Be a positive role model
- Be the Director of Emotional Safety
- Translate the values into behavioural standards and include these in job descriptions, performance discussions...
- Be clear about expectations of leaders throughout the organisation
Values in Action

Take one of your organisational values and translate this into behavioural expectations.

What do we all agree to do or not do because this value is important to us?
TEAM Level

- Set clear norms – what’s OK, what’s not OK?
- Make problems visible – transparency
- Talk to team members regularly, ask them how things are for them and LISTEN
- Regular team reviews
- Step up early and manage to minimise negative impact
Performance Gaps

Differences between what people do and what you need them to do

What’s happening now?
Describe without criticising or using words like ‘attitude’ or ‘not motivated’

How would you like it to be different?
Describe without using the word ‘improve’
TRUST
RESPECT
REGARD

STEP UP EARLY
MANAGE UP OR MANAGE OUT

Personal grievance
Leadership is relational

• It starts with you!

• What’s the shift you want to see in your leadership relationships?

• So what is the shift needed in you?
Contact us...

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