

Dealing with Workplace Negativity

Troubled Workplaces

It's hard to enjoy your job if co-workers constantly complain or are openly hostile to each other. Negativity and infighting drain workplace energy and can lead to employee turnover. Productivity suffers and the downward spiral can increase the risk of violence and financial loss. You don't have to be a victim of workplace negativity.

Possible Sources of Unrest

What causes workplace negativity? Is it rumors and misinformation or just bad communication?

Is it a lack of leadership, or is it too much work and not enough money? Worry about retirement, a lack of challenge, or other turmoil can all contribute to negativity. However, sometimes negativity can be caused by one or two employees who decide to engage in conflict at work. Sort through the sources of discontent and explore your options.

What You Can Do

If troublesome rumors persist, suggest a meeting with management to clarify the issues. "Hey guys, let's sit down with management and see if all these rumors are true." Get the issues on the table and give management an opportunity to clarify rumors and misperceptions. Explain what's happening. Management will work with you so unsettling rumors and stress stop.

Worker to Worker

Sometimes the problem is between coworkers. Personal conflicts developed outside of work creep into the workplace. Coworkers may be asked to take sides. If this happens to you—resist. Suggest an end to the problem and diffuse the situation. "You've been complaining about Marie taking long smoke breaks for two months. Why don't you talk either to Marie or to the manager?" Use management resources to intervene with warring coworkers. Always report the potential for violence immediately.



Rules for Meetings

These ground rules can help prevent negativity:

1. Be polite and professional. Don't lose credibility with angry, emotional outbursts.
2. Repeat issues for clarification. "What I hear you say is that the company is considering some restructuring. What form will that take and when?"
3. Focus on issues, not personalities. Say, "We have a company policy on smoking on the job, and yet it doesn't seem to be applied consistently to all employees." This is better than targeting one person

in front of his or her peers for resisting such a policy. Another option is discussing the issue in private.

Finding Resolution

When you find yourself embroiled in an unpleasant environment at work, you may be tempted to throw in the towel and leave. However, chances are, you may just run into this problem again in your next job. Bringing coworkers together to find solutions is possible and brings everyone closer. Take responsibility for creating a positive work environment that fosters camaraderie and career satisfaction. You'll develop valuable negotiation skills that can add to your desirability as a worker now and in your career later on.

What the EAP Can Do

If you tend to be an optimistic employee, workplace negativity can still affect you in ways that you may not like. Negativity is contagious. And long-term exposure to it can take a toll on anyone's positive attitude. If you reciprocate workplace negativity with others, gossip, or exchange negative comments about your employer with coworkers, it's time to call the EAP. The EAP will help you stop the downward slide in your morale and your coworker's, too.