

Managing a difficult employee

It happens all the time. You make a great hiring decision and then at some point in the process of the employee's tenure, you question your hiring decision. Difficult employees tend to be a difficult and lengthy topic, however, Marc Ankerman, president of Ankerman Training Solutions in Columbus Ohio, (www.trainingsolved.com) suggests a few things you can do to ease the pain of this situation before it gets out of hand.

- **Set clear goals.** If the goals for the employee are etched in stone, it makes it much easier for the employer to provide feedback about behavior. Lets assume we define our difficult employee as having a number of issues. If the issues deal with the work effort, then clear, descriptive and measurable accomplishments need to be described by the employer. If an employee is not 100% certain of what they have to do to meet the objectives, they are often seen as "difficult". This can also include the methods for accomplishing the work. The clearer you can be, the better the communication and chance that there is no misunderstanding of what needs to be accomplished.
- **Have regular reviews of progress.** Once those goals have been set it is important to keep track of the work, which is accomplished. If you normally would have monthly updates with your employees, consider a weekly update with this more challenging employee. Even if the meetings are brief, make the employee document progress and pitfalls of the actions they are taking. If they realize that you are up to speed with the issues, the chances are they will have less time or chance to complain about issues, or make things "difficult". Progress meetings should always have an agenda, which outlines what you are looking for in the update, and a timeline for future explanations and updates.
- **Identify open discussions of issues.** Many companies say they have an open-door policy, and this is great, but make sure you and this employee are communicating. If you hear of issues or concerns, bring them out into the open quickly. When you feel that "difficulties" are imminent, schedule additional time to put the issues to rest, and focus on the outcomes. Make the employee feel that they can bring these items to your attention, while asking the employee to assist in the solution. If they are willing to bring the issues out into the open, you have to adjust to having them be an agent of change and opportunity for solutions as well.
- **Plan on next steps.** Most companies have plans of action and steps, which can be taken to initiate disciplinary actions. If the employee continues to be difficult, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to deal with the situation. Far too often, managers and supervisors ignore the warning signs and hope things will get better. Make plans for action in cases of difficulty with an employee. Give them fair warning of the consequences of the action, and indicate what behavior you expect before your next review of performance. It is the action you take in the process, which will help you in the long run.

IN SUMMARY:

Set clear goals. Make sure you are on a level playing field. Everyone knows what is expected.

Have regular reviews of progress. Meet often to review accomplishments and expectations.

Identify open discussions of issues. Make sure the lines of communication are free and issues can be discussed.

Plan on next steps. Don't wait and hope it will get better. Be assertive in planning your action.

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