Executive Briefing

Managing Difficult Employees: Problems and Solutions

Profiles **International** SEA

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Difficult employees suck the life—and time—out of managers

Every workplace has them. They never come to work on time, they invade your personal space, and they eat their favorite hot lunches at their desks. They never refill the coffee pot, they shout on the phone during personal calls, and they complain about every little organizational change. Difficult employees provide an additional set of problems for any manager.

Effective managers are able to find ways to motivate and work with challenging employees. In most cases though, a few problem employees can require the majority of a manager's time. It has been estimated that difficult employees make up only 10% of a department or team, but they occupy 90% of the manager's time.

In this report, we identify four main problems managers experience with difficult employees:

1. Managing Difficult Personalities
2. Managing Employees with Bad Attitudes
3. Managing Poor Performers
4. Managing Communication Problems

It is important to remember that managers must understand their own management styles before they address issues with problem employees. Management is a two-way street, and sometimes the problems in the workplace are nothing more than the result of a mismatched employee and manager. If you feel like more than 10% of your employees are difficult employees, then you and your management style may be the problem. Psychographic assessments and 360-degree feedback can help identify any mismatched employees and the effects they are having on their coworkers.

There are no simple solutions when managing difficult employees. But it's important to identify problems quickly so that you can spend your time managing the entire staff, not just the high-maintenance employees.

Managing Difficult Employees: Problems and Solutions

1. Problem: Difficult personalities

Difficult personalities negatively impact coworkers and damage the culture of an organization

Whether it's the constant complaints or inappropriate jokes, some employees have personalities that make managing them and working with them strenuous. Most employees avoid these people while managers continue to struggle to create a unified team. There's nothing wrong with people with unique personalities, but in the workplace there are certain behaviors and personality traits that are unacceptable and require a measure of tact if they are to be dealt with appropriately.

Common difficult personalities:

• **The Bully**—Dominates conversations and manipulates people to get what he wants
• **The *Prima Donna***—Only looks out for "numero uno," and does so in dramatic fashion
• **The Control Freak**—Constantly noses into your business and trusts no one
• **The Know-It-All**—Converses with coworkers in a condescending manner
• **The Gossip**—Only talks to others to get information about office happenings
• **The Complainer**—Uses every interaction to whine about the smallest of changes
• **The Dirtbag**—Makes inappropriate and suggestive comments to coworkers

At some point in your management career you have run into an employee who is difficult to manage. Identifying these employees is only half the battle; managing difficult personalities and helping them to be productive is the difficult part.

1. Solution: Manage difficult personalities

A good manager must address employees with difficult personalities and deal with them appropriately

What is a manager supposed to do with difficult personalities? Asking an employee to change job assignments is a lot easier than asking him to stop bossing people around. Managing difficult personalities can be challenging, but there are some simple steps managers can take to help address these distracting employees.

First, a manager must make sure the employee is **aware** of the problems he is causing in the workplace. It is easy for an employee to be completely blind to his or her distracting behavior. Management should arrange to meet with the employee to explain how the behavior is affecting his coworkers and the office environment. Awareness is the first and most important step in dealing with an employee who has a difficult personality.

Secondly, the employee needs to show a **willingness to change** his demeanor and personality. If an employee complains all the time, he must admit to excessive complaining and make an effort to complain less in the future. The manager will need to provide additional support in order to motivate the employee to change. Although this will take more time and focus special attention on one employee, the other employees will be more productive after the distracting behavior has been eliminated.

Finally, managers can **enlist trustworthy employees** to provide feedback on the progress of the difficult employee. If the employee still chooses to engage in negative behavior and shows no willingness to change, then management may need to look at more drastic steps for dealing with him. Managing challenging employees is made easier through the assistance of coworkers and employees.

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2. Problem: Employees with bad attitudes

Negative attitudes about others—or the organization—dampen the work environment and ultimately decrease productivity

The work environment and office atmosphere have a significant impact on productivity. Companies spend time and money researching the best office layout, wall color, and break room design, but an employee with a bad attitude is one of the fastest ways to ruin the atmosphere of an office. Identifying negative attitudes is the first step in reclaiming employee productivity.

Some common negative attitudes:

• **Negative emotions toward the organization.** There are always those employees who are quick to make negative comments about upper management or coworkers. These negative feelings contradict the overall mission of the organization and may cause other employees to have

negative feelings as well.

• **Insubordinate challenges to authority.** There are many times when employees refuse to do what they are asked in order to prove a point or make a statement. These employees have no respect for you and will likely lose the trust of their peers.

• **Lazy, unmotivated.** These employees spend most of their day goofing off and distracting other employees.

• **Overly argumentative.** Employees who are looking to pick a fight put coworkers on edge and create a high level of discomfort in the workplace.

The more negative your employees are at work, the less likely they are to complete their work and add value to the organization. Bad attitudes must be dealt with quickly and maturely.

> " Negative feelings toward the organization contradict the overall mission of the organization and may cause other employees to have negative feelings as well. "

2. Solution: Find the source of the bad attitude

Improve the atmosphere of the office by dealing with bad attitudes

Managing employees' bad attitudes in the workplace is a tricky endeavor. Employees have bad attitudes for a variety of personal reasons, and addressing them as a manager can force you to cross lines that distance you from your employees. But allowing bad attitudes to fester causes serious problems for the overall atmosphere of the office and the productivity of every employee.

As a manager, there are some important things to remember when addressing bad attitudes in the workplace:

- **Bad attitudes are a serious problem.** Do not take bad attitudes lightly. They are different from other problems and must be addressed as such. An employee who has a bad attitude causes more problems than an employee who is trying hard but simply doesn't have the ability to do his or her job.

- **Understand why the employee has a bad attitude.** A bad attitude can be blamed on an employee's melancholy personality or negative disposition. But there is probably something else going on beneath the surface. Has anything happened in her life that has resulted in an adverse attitudinal change? A personality assessment helps managers know how an employee responds to adversity and how to best manage her through the challenging time.

- **Set boundaries and expectations for the employee.** Let the employee know that her behavior is negatively impacting the team. Offer your support, but be firm. Let the employee know that her job is in jeopardy if there is not a positive change in attitude and behavior.

> " Allowing bad attitudes to fester causes serious problems for the overall atmosphere of the office and productivity of each employee.

3. Problem: Poor performance

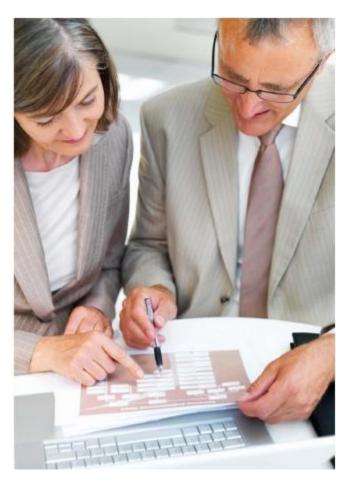**Poor-performing employees create new problems for managers**

Difficult employees can also cause problems by underperforming. You spend countless hours trying to hire quality, competent employees, but you still have employees who don't complete their assigned tasks or understand (or appreciate) the organizational goals of the company. In a team environment, a manager needs to be able to identify poor performance and know how to address it.

Common reasons that an employee may have difficulty doing the job:

• **Doesn't follow directions.** An employee who doesn't follow directions well is always someone who is difficult to manage. He makes his own rules and can't be trusted to complete important tasks.

• **Incompetence.** An incompetent employee makes mistakes, is disorganized, and has a hard time learning new concepts. He may be overwhelmed by a new job assignment or by having to adapt to something new.

• **Takes too long.** Timeliness wouldn't be a major problem to manage if it only involved one employee, but you may have five other employees who can't do their jobs until the slow-moving employee does his.

• **Nervous worker.** A nervous employee has a difficult time dealing with the stress and pressure of his job. If you manage in a highly competitive industry, nervous workers who are concerned about issues such as job security and meeting sales quotas could drag down performance.

3. Solution: Support and train poor performers

Managerial support is essential for transforming poor performers into quality employees

Insufficient production from a normally productive employee is a concern for every manager. Do not write off employees who are struggling to produce. As a manager, it is your responsibility to identify poor performance and motivate the employee to achieve the desired goal.

Keeping in mind the reasons for poor performance that we identified previously, here are some proposed solutions to those problems:

- **Communicate directions clearly.** For the employee who struggles to follow directions, try communicating those directions in a more detailed or concrete way.

- **Explain the expectations better.** An incompetent employee needs to learn more about what is expected of him. Take a step back and explain the expectations of the job and his role in the team and the organization.

- **Provide additional training.** If an employee has a difficult time organizing his work, provide a specific training day to help him learn how to organize better.

- **Use other team members.** If an employee continues to work at a slow pace, assign a more experienced team member to work with him. Providing extra help and support will help speed up his processes.

If additional support and training do not help the employee achieve more success at work, there is probably a poor fit between the employee and the job. Assessments can help managers identify job fit and provide suggested jobs for each employee.

4. Problem: Communication

Communication between employees and management must be clear and coherent

Communication is constant and flows through many different media. Email, instant messaging, texting, and face-to-face communication help to transfer ideas, information, and instructions. Methods of communication continue to increase, but miscommunication is still a daily occurrence in the workplace. Managers must learn how to best communicate with each employee to ensure that the message sent is the same as the message received.

Here are some common communication problems between a manager and an employee:

- **The employee appears to understand but actually doesn't.** This communication error often results in numerous mistakes in the workplace. The time and energy spent on unnecessary work costs the organization money. Miscommunications impact the bottom line quickly.

- **The manager doesn't understand the technical language of the employee.** In this communication error, the employee may be referring to a technical term that the manager has never heard before. The manager may assume that the employee knows what he is talking about even if she doesn't understand the message at all.

Although there are a myriad of different management communication problems in the workplace, these are just a few that affect every manager and employee. Managers must seek clarity in their communication with each employee.

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4. Solution: Create quality dialogue with each employee

Solve communication issues through clear and honest conversations

At the end of the day, communication between a manager and his employees needs to be clear. Establishing effective communication practices in your department will not only increase efficiency, but also improve trust, honesty, and openness.

Here are some general tips for avoiding management communication problems in the workplace.

If an employee seems to understand, but doesn't:
*   Make sure your employees feel comfortable enough to tell you that they "don't know" or "don't understand."
*   Have the employee repeat back the instructions or message you just gave her until she says exactly what you said.
*   Try hands-on demonstrations to make sure the employee knows exactly what to do.

If the manager doesn't understand the technical language of the employee:
*   Spend time learning more about the details of your employee's job.
*   Find an employee who can serve as a translator to explain the technical jargon so that you know exactly what your employee is trying to communicate.
*   Ask the employee to draw pictures or diagrams. Find another way for the employee to express herself.

Communication often requires simple strategies such as the ones listed above. If you and an employee consistently find yourselves making mistakes due to communication errors, the professional relationship may be a bad fit.

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Establishing effective communication practices in your department will not only increase efficiency, but also improve trust, honesty, and openness.

What can you do to manage a difficult employee?

Whatever the problem may be, these actions will lead to the solution

Managing difficult employees tests the limits of a manager's time and energy, but the results can often be rewarding. Below is a list of managerial actions that you can use to address any problem with a difficult employee.

1. Have a one-on-one conversation.
2. Schedule a formal employee review meeting, even if it's not time for a scheduled review.
3. Meet with the employees involved to discuss the problem.
4. Consult with other managers and your boss.
5. Put the employee on probation for a specified amount of time.
6. Assign another, more experienced employee to work with and mentor the problem

   employee.
7. Write clearer guidelines for the employee.
8. Make yourself available for additional training with employee.
9. Provide the employee with outside training.
10. Provide the employee with hands-on experience while you observe.
11. Ask the employee to submit reports to you about how he or she is seeking to change.
12. Give the employee a specific time limit for showing improvement (with defined goals).
13. Terminate the employee as gently as you can and provide the employee with an explanation, pay for hours already worked and severance pay.
14. For a more serious problem, terminate the employee immediately, explain the cause, and provide pay for any hours already worked.
15. Report any criminal actions to the appropriate authorities.

It is important to remember that each situation is different and may require only a few of these suggestions.

Summary

Take the time to manage the most difficult, distracting employees

Dealing with difficult employees is inevitable. As a manager, there will always be employees or clients who are annoying, lazy, or just downright rude. You have a choice to either work with them or let them go. Terminating the employment of difficult employees may help you in the short term, but it also increases hiring costs. And what if the employee is a high performer?

In this document, we looked at four different employee problems that require specialized management skills:

1. **Managing Difficult Personalities**

2. **Managing Bad Attitudes**
3. **Managing Poor Performers**
4. **Managing Communication Problems**

Although managing difficult employees takes time, it is still worth the effort in order to avoid additional hiring costs. Assessments also help managers deal with difficult employees. Knowing how your employees respond in stressful situations or how they fit with a certain management style arms you with valuable information that can help you manage problem employees. Assessments provide a vast amount of information that you can use to make decisions concerning your employees.

Difficult employees are always going to be in the workplace. The way in which you manage these employees will not only effect your reputation as a manager, but also the organization's bottom line.

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Introducing Profiles International

How We Do It — Overview of our assessments and solutions

Your Business Objective	PXT	PPI	CP360	PMF	PSA	CSP
High-level Strategic Workforce Management						
Identifying high-potential employees and managers	PXT		CP360		PSA	CSP
Strategic workforce and succession planning	PXT	PPI	CP360		PSA	CSP
Restructuring, reorganizing and downsizing	PXT	PPI		PMF	PSA	CSP
Post-merger integration of organizations	PXT	PPI		PMF	PSA	CSP
Everyday Workforce Management						
Screening, interviewing and selecting job candidates	PXT					
On-boarding new employees	PXT	PPI		PMF		
Improving employee productivity and work quality	PXT	PPI				
Improving employee motivation and communication		PPI		PMF		
Resolving conflict between co-workers		PPI				
Selecting and managing teams		PPI				
Evaluating management effectiveness	PXT	PPI	CP360			
Prioritizing management development needs			CP360			
Sales and Customer-facing Workforce Management						
Screening, interviewing and selecting job candidates					PSA	CSP
Retaining and growing customers and accounts					PSA	CSP
Improving sales performance		PPI	CP360	PMF	PSA	

Legend

PXT	ProfileXT	PMF	Profiles Managerial Fit
PPI	Profiles Performance Indicator	PSA	Profiles Sales Assessment
CP360	CheckPoint360	CSP	Customer Service Profile

Assessment descriptions

Profiles Performance Indicator™ (PPI)

The **Profiles Performance Indicator** is a DISC-type assessment that reveals aspects of an individual's personality that could impact his fit with his manager, coworkers, and team as well as his job performance. It is used primarily for motivating and coaching employees, and resolving post-hire conflict and performance issues.

The PPI specifically measures an individual's motivational intensity and behaviors related to productivity, quality of work, initiative, teamwork, problem solving, and adapting to change as well as response to conflict, stress, and frustration. The output from this assessment serves as an "operator's manual" for an employee, which helps managers better motivate, coach, and communicate with the employee. It also helps to predict and minimize conflict among coworkers, and it provides crucial information for improving team selection and performance.

A powerful feature of the PPI is the **Team Analysis Report**, designed to help managers form new teams, reduce team conflict, improve team communication, improve their ability to anticipate problems, and enhance their team leadership skills.

It helps evaluate overall team balance, strengths, and weaknesses as well as team members' personality characteristics along 12 key factors: control, composure, social influence, analytical, patience, results orientation, precision, expressiveness, ambition, teamwork, positive expectancy, and quality of work. It also provides team leaders with practical recommendations and action steps to take in order to succeed in their jobs.

Assessment descriptions

CheckPoint 360° ™

The **CheckPoint Management System** is a 360-degree assessment. It is used primarily to evaluate the effectiveness of your managers. This assessment combines feedback from direct reports, peers, supervisors, and even customers, with a personalized program for developing specific leadership skils based on that feedback. This process highlights a manager's job performance in eight skill clusters: leadership, communication, personal development, development of others, production, task management, relationships, and adaptability.

The CheckPoint 360 helps managers identify and prioritize their own development opportunities, and it helps the organization to better focus management training and development investments, proactively uncover misaligned priorities between senior executives and front-line managers, and surface management issues that could lead to low employee productivity, morale, satisfaction, and turnover.
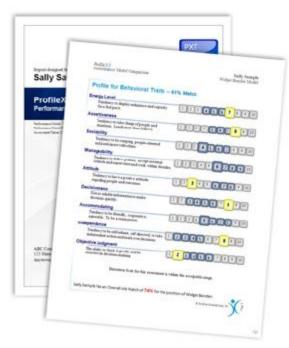
Profiles Managerial Fit ™ (PMF)

People typically don't quit their company, they quit their bosses. Profiles Managerial Fit (PMF) measures critical aspects of compatibility between a manager and their employees. This report offers an in-depth look at how the employee learns and five critical dimensions of compatibility with their manager: self-assurance, conformity, optimism, decisiveness, self-reliance, and objectivity.

Managers use this information for adapting their style to get the most from each employee, improve communication, increase engagement, satisfaction, and productivity, and reduce employee turnover.

Managing Difficult Employees: Problems and Solutions

Assessment descriptions

ProfileXT® (PXT)

The **ProfileXT (PXT)** assessment measures how well an individual fits specific jobs in your organization. The "job matching" feature of the PXT is unique and enables you to evaluate an individual relative to the qualities required to perform successfully in a specific job. It is used primarily for employee selection, onboarding, managing, and strategic workforce planning.

This assessment reveals deep, objective insight into an individual's thinking and reasoning style, relevant behavioral traits, occupational interests, and match to specific jobs in your organization. It helps your managers interview and select people who have the highest probability of being successful in a role, and provides practical recommendations for coaching them to maximum performance. It also gives your organization consistent language and metrics to support strategic workforce and succession planning, talent management, and reorganization efforts.

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Profiles International – Who We Are

Profiles International helps organizations worldwide create high-performing workforces.

Through our comprehensive employment assessments and innovative talent management solutions, our clients gain a competitive advantage by selecting the right people and managing them to their full potential.

Profiles serves 122 countries around the globe and has material in 32 languages.

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