Dear Office Coach . . .

Q: I manage a retail store where we often encounter customers with challenging personalities. Several of my employees complain constantly about how stupid the customers are and what dumb questions they ask.

I want to have a warm and friendly workplace, but this ongoing negativity is eroding the atmosphere. I have tried asking everyone to be more positive, but the negativity spreads like a disease.

Since we don't work in a bubble, I'm sure that customers overhear these comments. How do I put a stop to this?

Frustrated Manager
TOPICS for TODAY

★ Is Your Workplace Contaminated?
★ What Causes Negative Behavior?
★ Recognizing Your “Negativity Carriers”
★ How Managers Unwittingly Encourage Negativity
★ Six Tools for Neutralizing Negativity
★ Surviving in a Toxic Organization

NEGATIVITY INFECTIONS

Is Your Workplace Contaminated?
NEGATIVITY

Any verbal or non-verbal behavior that causes others to feel angry, depressed, anxious, discouraged, or hopeless

7 Symptoms of a Negativity Infection

- Informal conversations include a lot of griping.
- Employees seldom laugh, joke, or celebrate.
- Meetings and discussions quickly take on a negative tone.
- People often question the motives of others.
- Coworkers become easily annoyed or irritated with one another.
- Managers hear a lot of complaints from employees.
- Office events are poorly attended.
The Hidden Costs of Negativity

Emotional contagion
Reduced motivation
Lower productivity
Absenteeism
Turnover
Diagnosing the Cause

➔ Problematic personality traits

Dear Office Coach . . .

Q: A woman in our office complains constantly. She gripes about being single, needing money, and lots of other personal problems. Our company has been laying people off, but instead of being thankful to have a job, she grumbles about how they “took away her overtime”.

When we try to point out the good things in her life, she gets quiet and won’t talk for hours. A couple of us thought she might be depressed, so we suggested that she contact our employee assistance program. However, she didn’t like what the counselor said, so she won’t go back.

Times are tough, and her chronic negativity makes everything more depressing. What should we do?

Tired of Listening
Management Strategy for Problem Personalities

DON’T HIRE THEM!!

CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

Diagnosing the Cause

- Problematic personality traits
- Career setbacks & obstacles
Dear Office Coach . . .

Q: I feel that I’m living a solitary nightmare at work. My job is stressful and unrewarding, with little chance of advancement. I’m also twenty years older than most of my coworkers, so I don’t fit in well.

I find myself complaining constantly, because I can’t seem to control my anger and unhappiness. I have blown up at my supervisor more than once. I’m embarrassed about this childish behavior, which has cost me the respect of my colleagues.

I don’t like the person I have become, but I don’t know how to change. Starting over somewhere else would be difficult. What can I do?

Miserable

Diagnosing the Cause

- Problematic personality traits
- Career setbacks & obstacles
- Resistance to change
CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

Change = Loss

What have they lost?

- Safety & Security
- Relationships
- Competence
- Control
- Meaning & Purpose

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CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

**Diagnosing the Cause**

- Problematic personality traits
- Career setbacks & obstacles
- Resistance to change
- Management actions

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**Dear Office Coach . . .**

“I work in a medical facility taking care of people with cancer. I love the work, but my boss tries to create tension in our group. She says she wants us to get along, but she talks about everyone behind their backs and keeps things stirred up.”

“Our vice-president speaks only to certain employees. When she comes into our office, she will say hello to two people and ignore the rest of us, even though we’re sitting right there. Since we all do the same job, we can’t help feeling offended.”

“Our new CEO is very vindictive. He has a network of “spies” who feed him stories about people he doesn’t like, then he uses fabricated information to fire them. Anyone who points out problems is put on a written warning for insubordination.”
CAUSES OF NEGATIVITY

Diagnosing the Cause

- Problematic personality traits
- Career setbacks & obstacles
- Resistance to change
- Management actions

NEGATIVITY CARRIERS

Recognizing Your “Negativity Carriers”
**NEGATIVITY CARRIERS**

*People who promote negativity . . .*

- Whiners & Complainers
- Constant Critics
- Tattletales & Gossips
- Rabble-rousers
- Office Bullies
- Gloomy Pessimists
- Stealth Attackers

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**NEGATIVITY CARRIERS**

#1 Whiners & Complainers

*Talk at great length about whatever is making them unhappy at the moment*

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Q: Our new coworker, “Jim”, seemed nice at first, but then he turned into some kind of monster who always has to be right about everything.

If Jim asks you a question, he will immediately argue about your answer. He may even survey other people, hoping to prove you wrong.

Jim openly criticizes other employees in front of customers, but if anyone points out his own mistakes, he becomes very defensive and later tries to retaliate.

We’ve talked with our manager about this problem, but so far nothing has changed. Now people have started to talk about quitting. Sick of Jim
#3 Tattletales & Gossips

Love to “spread the news” with little regard for whether it is actually true

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#4 Rabble-rousers

Try to get people “stirred up” about anything they think is wrong or unfair

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Dear Office Coach... 

Q: I have a co-worker who constantly tries to bully me. She will physically hover over me, back me up to my desk, or crowd me against the wall. When I asked her to hold the door because my arms were full of packages, she just laughed and let the door shut in my face. She has treated other people like this in the past, so apparently I'm just fresh meat. I would like to deprive her of the sick thrill of annoying me, but ignoring her doesn't work, and I can't always avoid her. What else can I do? 

Fed Up
#6 **Gloomy Pessimists**

Consistently point out potential negative outcomes of any action or decision

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#7 **Stealth Attackers**

Appear positive when talking with management, but try to stir up trouble behind the scenes

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NEGATIVITY CARRIERS

People who promote negativity . . .

- Whiners & Complainers
- Constant Critics
- Tattletales & Gossips
- Rabble-rousers
- Office Bullies
- Gloomy Pessimists
- Stealth Attackers

MANAGEMENT PITFALLS

How Managers Unwittingly Encourage Negativity
Quick Quiz: Do you encourage negative behavior?

- I often get tired of listening to complaining employees.
- I am frequently surprised when employees get upset about changes.
- Some of my employees are chronic tattletales.
- I openly share all management information with employees.
- I sometimes find myself joining employee gossip sessions.
- Employees often wander into my office to gripe about things.
- I try to share my honest feelings with employees.
- I often don’t have time to prepare employees for upcoming changes.
- I have some employees who closely monitor their coworkers.
- I would like to discourage negative behavior, but I don’t know how.

MANAGEMENT PITFALLS

Negativity Pitfalls for Managers

Tolerating negative behavior
**Dear Office Coach . . .**

Q: I supervise a data clerk who is rude and uncooperative. She acts without consulting me, as if I don’t exist, and snaps at me whenever I tell her something. My manager and I have discussed this, but have not been able to come up with a solution. There is just no way to communicate with her. Any suggestions?

*Defeated*

---

**Negativity Pitfalls for Managers**

- Tolerating negative behavior
- Using the wrong “reward equation”
Q: One of my coworkers seems determined to catch me making errors, even though she does not supervise me and her job is completely unrelated to mine. She routinely reviews my work, then emails her concerns to my boss.

When my manager questions me about these issues, there is always a simple explanation, and he has no further concerns. Nevertheless, I'm tired of this woman checking on me. How do I tactfully tell her to stop?

Not Her Employee
MANAGEMENT PITFALLS

Negativity Pitfalls for Managers

► Tolerating negative behavior
► Using the wrong “reward equation”
► Joining the “complainer chorus”

MANAGEMENT PITFALLS

Negativity Pitfalls for Managers

► Tolerating negative behavior
► Using the wrong “reward equation”
► Joining the “complainer chorus”
► Failing to filter information
Q: My boss has a hard time keeping his feelings to himself. For example, he frequently tells us that senior management has doubts about the value of our department. He also says he’ll probably be fired because management doesn’t like him.

His paranoid comments are making the staff feel resentful toward the company, and morale is declining rapidly. Personally, I’m very happy with both the company and my job, but my manager’s pessimistic attitude drags me down.

Bummed Out

Dear Office Coach . . .

Managing Pitfalls

Negativity Pitfalls for Managers

► Tolerating negative behavior
► Using the wrong “reward equation”
► Joining the “complainer chorus”
► Failing to filter information

Poor change management
Negativity Pitfalls for Managers

- Tolerating negative behavior
- Using the wrong “reward equation”
- Joining the “complainer chorus”
- Failing to filter information
- Poor change management

Six Strategies for Neutralizing Negativity
**Behavioral Coaching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To help an employee change specific negative behaviors</td>
<td>• Educate the employee about the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have a two-way discussion about change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Agree on action plans &amp; follow up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The 5-Step Behavioral Coaching Process**

- **Your Perspective**
  - Share your observations
  - Explain need for change

- **Two-way Discussion**
  - Discuss causes & barriers
  - Agree on strategies for change
  - Provide ongoing feedback
**Invitation to Change**

**Complainers:** “I’ve noticed that you seem to spend a lot of time complaining about things that make you unhappy. Your coworkers find this very depressing, so in the future, I need for you to keep these negative thoughts to yourself. However, if you have problems that I can help with, please let me know.”

**Critics:** “When other people present ideas or proposals, you immediately start talking about why they won’t work. Although you often make some good points, this quick criticism tends to discourage creative thinking, so I need you to look for the possible benefits of an idea before you attack it.”

**Bullies:** “You often become verbally aggressive with people in meetings. In a professional work environment, it is not acceptable to yell or insult people, so if you want to have a career here, this needs to change immediately.”

---

**Invitation to Change**

**Rabble-rousers:** “When you are upset about something, you often become quite vocal with your coworkers and get them upset as well. This is very disruptive, so when you have a problem or concern, I need for you to bring it to me first to see if we can work it out.”

**Stealth Attackers:** “I understand that you’ve been saying some very negative things about our new product line. I was surprised, because I’ve never heard you express those concerns. In the future, I would appreciate it if you would bring these issues directly to me so that we can discuss them.”
**The 5-Step Behavioral Coaching Process**

- Share your observations
- Explain need for change
- Discuss causes & barriers
- Agree on strategies for change
- Provide ongoing feedback

**Strategies for Neutralizing Negativity**

- Behavioral Coaching
- Motivational Levers
- Career Goals
- Listening Posts
- Team Turnaround
- Coaches & Facilitators
**Using Motivational Levers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To reduce negativity by increasing job satisfaction | • Find out what is missing in the employee’s job  
• Determine if job changes are feasible  
• Make job change contingent upon behavior change |

**Common Motivators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Challenging tasks, clear goals, specific projects, success measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Friendly relationships, frequent interaction, time for discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Varied tasks, new ideas, different approaches, brainstorming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Making decisions, directing others, leading projects, autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Helping others, working for a cause, fulfilling a purpose, living their values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>Complex problems, mental stimulation, demonstrating expertise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Office Coach . . .

**Q:** My department manager has stopped sharing information with me. I used to be able to point out the flaws in her thinking, but now she keeps all her plans to herself.

Even though I am older and more experienced, she ignores my suggestions and seems to want to control everything.

This woman thinks she’s a good leader, but I’ve told her to her face that she’s a micromanager. How should I deal with this problematic boss?

*Unappreciated*

---

**Strategies for Neutralizing Negativity**

- **Behavioral Coaching**
- **Motivational Levers**
- **Career Goals**
- **Listening Posts**
- **Team Turnaround**
- **Coaches & Facilitators**
### Exploring Career Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To help employees see that their negative behavior is self-defeating | • Learn about the employee’s work-related goals  
• Show how negative behavior could keep them from reaching their goals  
• Agree on strategies for change |

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### Dear Office Coach . . .

**Q:** One of my employees does not like reporting to me. This woman is older than I am and recently transferred into my department from a higher-level position. Although she will take direction from other people, she argues with me about everything. I have not told my manager about this problem. Do you think I should talk with him about it?  

*Stymied Supervisor*
**Strategies for Neutralizing Negativity**

- Behavioral Coaching
- Motivational Levers
- Career Goals
- Listening Posts
- Team Turnaround
- Coaches & Facilitators

**Creating Listening Posts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To provide opportunities for employees to tell you about their concerns | • Have regular interaction with employees  
  • Allow time to discuss issues, concerns, & rumors  
  • Increase listening during periods of change |
Dear Office Coach . . .

**Q:** Lately, I have become short and snappy with my coworkers. I am the secretary for a medical group, and this job is very frustrating.

I have to answer the phone, respond to patients, transmit doctors' orders, look up information, run errands, and answer stupid questions.

I don’t want to be rude, but it’s getting harder to bite my tongue. How can I stop being so irritable?  

*Not a Grouch*

---

**Listening Methods**

- “Management by walking around”
- Regular staff meetings
- Eating lunch with employees
- Interaction with remote employees
- Skip-level meetings
- Group listening sessions & retreats
- Questions on index cards
- Employee surveys & focus groups
- Anonymous complaint channels
Every day, I have to work with a group of rude and catty women. They call me a tattletale, even though I'm not. When I’m around, they make whispered remarks to each other.

I’ve now adopted the attitude of “speak only when spoken to”. I limit my comments to “good morning” or “how is the weather”, then I listen to my iPod all day.

Although I like my work, I dread going to the office. The tension is taking a toll on me emotionally. Our manager is no help at all. What should I do?

Hate My Coworkers
**Goal**

To change the negative culture of a work group

**Steps**

- Enlist the entire group in becoming a better team
- Take a “gap analysis” approach
- Provide feedback & follow-up

---

**GAP ANALYSIS**

Current State  

Desired Future

GAP
**Team Turnaround Steps**

- Set aside specific time for a “team turnaround” meeting.
- Take the group offsite if possible. Consider using a facilitator.
- Describe your concerns in terms of business problems.
- Engage the group in defining the kind of team they want to be.
- Conduct a “gap analysis” with the team.
- Agree on specific action steps and a feedback plan.
- Assess progress during regular meetings.

**Strategies for Neutralizing Negativity**

- Behavioral Coaching
- Motivational Levers
- Career Goals
- Listening Posts
- Team Turnaround

Coaches & Facilitators
**Goal:** To resolve serious issues that are beyond the manager's capabilities

**Steps:**
- Recognize when a problem exceeds your ability to deal with it
- Locate a professional coach or facilitator
- Be sure the consultant is experienced with your type of problem

---

**Strategies for Neutralizing Negativity**

- Behavioral Coaching
- Motivational Levers
- Career Coaching
- Listening Posts
- Team Turnaround
- Coaches & Facilitators
TERMINATION

"Either people choose to change or we can choose to change people."

Katherine Meyer
Surviving in a Toxic Organization

11 Signs of a Toxic Organization

1. People try to avoid talking to managers.
2. Management egos need to be stroked constantly.
3. Executives are primarily focused on increasing their power or pay.
4. Ongoing power struggles consume a lot of time and energy.
5. Entire departments are at war with each other.
6. Gossip, blaming, and back-biting are common among coworkers.
7. More attention is given to what’s wrong than what’s right.
8. Problems automatically trigger the search for a scapegoat.
9. A lot of energy is spent on CYA activities.
10. Disagreements become personal and insulting.
11. No consideration is given to personal or family needs.
TOXIC WORKPLACE

Strategies for Staying Sane

- Emotionally detach. Don’t allow it to matter. Keep it out of your head.
- Lower your expectations. It’s not going to change.
- Do what’s required at work, but save your energy for job-seeking.
- Do not get sucked into unproductive games.
- Avoid spending unnecessary time with negative people.
- Find social support outside of work.
- Use effective stress management techniques.
- Focus on the future. And get out of there.

Most negativity problems can be solved.
CONTACT INFORMATION

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Your Office Coach

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» Book: “Secrets to Winning at Office Politics”

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