

Diffuse weapons of morale destruction in the office

We've all encountered "Attacker" behavior in the workplace. Hostile, angry without provocation, Attackers spit out their bullets of criticism with a staccato rate of speech and seem positively gleeful when doing so. Demeaning, condescending and sarcastic, Attackers sneer at us, disrespect us, publicly humiliate us, intimidate us and disable us.

You don't have to answer their aggression with aggression, but you can mitigate those attacks and shield your employees from the spray of negativity.

ATTACKS FROM ABOVE

As your boss, the Attacker makes you most vulnerable by pushing you to the point where you lose your composure. This, of course, only incites further abuse.

For some of us, the searing, spirit-crushing comments of the Attacker haunt us for years, eroding our confidence and impeding our careers. If this describes you, don't wait for someone to come and save you. Save yourself. Transfer to another position or leave the company. Yes, you can go to human resources and complain, but the discomfort and stress of launching a formal action rarely produce sustained change in Attackers.

Alternatively, if you consider encounters

with Attackers as unpleasant but not wounding, you can use your emotional toughness to help others and yourself. Here's how:

Talk to your colleagues and volunteer to be the one who interacts with the Attacker boss. Whatever the need for engaging the Attacker, whether to receive assignments or to submit completed work, be the primary point of contact.

Setting yourself up as a buffer has three main benefits.

First, your colleagues will be grateful, because they no longer have to deal with the Attacker.

Next, the Attacker will realize that he or she can be as ugly and difficult as desired, with impunity, since you will have consistently demonstrated an imperiousness to the person's style.

The Attacker prefers this arrangement because it creates distance from the great, blubbery masses of humanity. Be prepared, though, as a result of your ability the Attacker will depend on your presence at every move.

Finally, you'll develop a reputation for being strong enough and secure enough to deal with the likes of an Attacker. This distinguishes you and makes senior executives take notice.

PUT MUTINY UNDER SCRUTINY

As your subordinate, the Attacker makes you most vulnerable by decimating the



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morale of your team and being a divisive force between your team and all others in the organization. You may be completely unaware that such an individual is on your staff.

Attackers aren't stupid; they rarely display their venomous behavior in the presence of their boss. Absent the complaints of others, the only other way to reveal an Attacker is through the implementation of a 360 degree feedback process.

Once you know you have an Attacker onboard, your first obligation is to get help for the rest of your staff.

Ensure they receive training or coaching immediately on how to neutralize the Attacker's internal effects and then realign the work flow to minimize interaction with the Attacker.

Deciding what to do about the Attacker is the step that seems to stymie even benevolent senior managers. Termination may seem like a no-brainer, but by the time Attackers can get away with their special brand of behavior, they're usually quite accomplished in their field. They generate the most revenue, have the strongest relationships with the most valued clients or possess information or abilities that help maintain your market position.

Executives must make a choice between protecting the business or protecting employees from the emotional turmoil caused by Attackers — and that's the real no-brainer the rest of us have to learn to cope with.

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