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Human Resources: The Seven Classic Types of Workplace Behavior

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In any workplace, there are seven classic styles of behavior: Commander, Drifter, Attacker, Pleaser, Performer, Avoider and Analytical. When at their worst, each of these styles of behavior makes you as an employer vulnerable in different ways. Here is a brief description of each style, with tips to help you manage your vulnerability to each.

1. Commanders -- Demanding and domineering, Commanders are the stereotypical control freaks. Bossy and abrupt to the point of rudeness, they're crisp and direct and not terribly tactful. Uncomfortable with and aggravated by phrases such as "I feel" or "Let's share," they don't intend offense. It's just that they're otherwise mentally engaged, and the softer side of human interaction isn't a priority for them.

Commanders may exhibit behavior which you interpret as an attempt to take over your job, but which in their view is merely a demonstration of initiative and drive. If you chastise them for "not knowing their place," they'll go around, over or behind you, or they'll quit. Instead, delegate substantively to your Commander. Articulate the desired result, and then stand aside and let them figure out the "how to's."

Value and validate Commanders for their ability to overcome obstacles, to implement and to achieve results.

2. Drifters – Free-spirited and easygoing, disorganized and impulsive, Drifters are virtually antithetical to Commanders. They have difficulty with structure of any kind, whether it relates to rules, work hours or deadlines. Their extremely short attention span means they miss details and fail to follow up. Although warm and friendly, their behavior can be a source of extreme exasperation for their workplace colleagues.

Drifters make you vulnerable by causing others to question your managerial effectiveness. To successfully manage a Drifter, keep assignments short, provide lots of fun and variety, flexible work schedules, etc. Others may question why you're treating the Drifter differently than others. Your response must be that you manage everyone as individuals, while simultaneously ensuring that work

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products are completed to spec.

Value and validate the Drifter for their innovation and creativity, their ability to improvise on a moment's notice and their out-of-the-box thinking.

3. Attackers -- Angry and hostile, cynical and grouchy, Attackers are often the most demoralizing influence in the workplace. They are highly critical of others in public, using demeaning and condescending tones. With biting sarcasm, their attacks on others are personal in nature, tantamount to verbal abuse. Attackers view themselves as superior to others, continually expressing contempt and disgust for the incompetence and inadequacy of their fellow workers.

Attackers decimate the morale of the rest of your staff. To leverage this vulnerability, reassign work to minimize others' interaction with the Attacker, counsel others on how to cope successfully with Attacker behavior and evaluate the cost/benefit of keeping the Attacker on board.

Value and validate the Attacker for their ability to take on the ugly, unpopular assignments no one else has the mettle to do, and for their ability to make unemotional decisions.

4. Pleasers -- Thoughtful, pleasant and helpful, pleasers are easy to get along with on a personal level. They view their work associates as extended family members and have a high need for socialization at work. Unable to say "no" to the requests of others, Pleasers can't handle conflict, developing instant migraines or stomach problems to escape having to deal with it.

Pleasers make you vulnerable by subordinating what's best for the company to the maintenance of relationships. If keeping you informed will get someone else in trouble, they'll feign ignorance to protect the other person. To manage this, you'll need to continually stress the concept of the "greater good." They also commit acts of devotion which tend to hold you hostage when it's time for you to give them critical feedback. Manage this by using the "sandwich technique" with your Pleaser. Sandwich the criticism between two affirming statements.

Value and validate Pleasers for the way they humanize the workplace, and for their helpful, collaborative work style.

5. Performers -- Flamboyant and loud, jovial and entertaining, Performers are often the most favorite personality in the workplace. Their wit and mental quickness makes us laugh. They charm and delight others with ambassadorial sophistication. They're the first to volunteer in public venues, and the last to accept responsibility. Performers are self-promoting hustlers who use others as stepping stones on their path to the limelight. They create a false impression of their productivity by claiming ownership of high-profile projects and try to inflate their status by always seeming to be in a hurry to get to something important. In fact, the reason Performers are in such a hurry is that they've been so busy promoting themselves that their workload has backed up!

Performers make you vulnerable by distorting the truth to make themselves look good. Don't take action on anything the Performer tells you until you have verified the facts. Link incentives to improved teammanship.

Value and validate your Performer for their ability to establish new relationships and for their persuasive and public speaking skills.

6. Avoiders -- Quiet and reserved, Avoiders are the wallflowers of the world. They create warm, cozy nest-like environments and prefer to work alone. If forced to work on a team or committee, they speak only to validate what others have said. Any type of criticism makes them feel threatened and insecure. They fear taking initiative and shun increased responsibility because of the attendant visibility and accountability. They'll do precisely what they're told -- no more, it's true, but no less either. Avoiders will sacrifice money, position, growth

and new opportunities for the safety of status quo.

Avoiders make you vulnerable by not taking any initiative whatsoever. This can be so frustrating as to make you lose your temper. Doing so, however, is disabling and unproductive for your Avoider. Instead, understand that you'll always need to provide detailed instructions, and don't expect to be successful in pushing a fear-based individual toward increased responsibility.

Value and validate your Avoider for their reliability, for their meticulous attention to your instructions and for getting the job done right the first time, every time.

7. Analyticals -- Cautious, precise and diligent, Analyticals are the personification of procrastination, checking everything thrice. They even proofread photocopies. It is this near obsession with detail that incapacitates Analyticals in times of urgency. No matter what new idea anyone has, Analyticals have scores of reasons why it won't work and shouldn't be done. They're socially awkward, and prefer to distance themselves from people.

Analyticals make you vulnerable by overwhelming you with information. Manage this by highlighting selected sections of the data, asking meaningful questions and expressing appreciation that you can rely on them for fluency with the entire document.

Value and validate your Analytical for their commitment to accuracy and for their ability to anticipate and evaluate risk far enough in advance to allow risks to be reduced.

Of course, these descriptions are general and stereotypical. Some of your associates might seem to fit a particular profile exactly, while others may reflect a combination of several styles. There is no cookie-cutter approach to dealing with human behavior, but these tips should help you customize your interactions to optimize workplace results.

Dalton Alliances Inc. is a business consultancy specializing in the communication, management and behavioral sciences.