

I want to share the following article with you. This article is a reprint from the March 2007 "Branch Managers Letter" written by Lana Chandler. Lana can be reached at Lana@BranchManagersLetter.com.

Negative Employees...How Leaders Can Motivate and Sustain Change.

If an employee embezzles, naturally you fire the person. But how do you deal with a negative employee? Just ignoring the situation and hoping it goes away drains profits and moral. "Negative employees like embezzlers cost you money," contends Taye, President of Taye H. Cairnes, Inc. While there's obviously a difference between embezzling and negativity, they do share common ground. Both are a drain on your institution's financial resources. "Every employee – top to bottom – is supposed to be a steward of the institution's resources and reputation," Cairnes says. "All manners of negativity bring down the front-line, resulting in lost opportunities and lower productivity."

Negativity Takes Different Forms

Employees express negativity in different ways. These people may spread rumors, gossip about team members or be curt with clients. They may be a genius at finding reasons why things can't be done...or extremely talented at bashing coworkers' self esteem. "A negative employee is one you always have to prod to do their job. They complain a lot. When new ideas come up, negative employees say things like *that won't work* or *they would have asked us*," Cairnes continues. "Negative employees are the ones who roll their eyes at suggestions. They are the ones you hate to ask to volunteer for something because you know they're going to say no. Sometimes negative employees are real domineering."

Body language is one of the most common ways negativity reveals itself. "A lot of negative people are smart enough not to say out loud *I think this is stupid*. "They've done that before and gotten into trouble," Cairnes says. "Body language will tell you. Effective leaders know to look for this. It's in the eyes and mouth." They roll their eyes when you introduce new ideas. You're talking to someone and their shoulders are slumped or they won't make eye contact. Their body language is not engaged with you. "You know when that is happening. No one has to tell you," Cairnes says. "It's the same with clients. They can see and feel negativity."

Effective Strategies

Eradicating negativity completely from the workplace is next to impossible, but you can make substantial changes. "There is no leader who can make everybody happy all the time," says Cairnes. You can, however, curb negativity by implementing these strategies:

Create a "culture of respect". "Look at any good service provider like Nordstrom, Southwest Airlines or Ritz-Carlton. You don't see negative employees. They know the value of making sure the workplace has a culture of respect," points out Cairnes. A "culture of respect" helps motivate and nourish positive behaviors. If employees do not feel respected, they will not be positive or motivated. It's your choice whether you treat them as more than or less than. If you treat them as less than, then that's how they behave. Treat them as more than, then that's what you get.

Focus on building employees up. "Picture a big room. There are negativity gnomes all around me. I'm going to fill up this balloon with positive reinforcement, a culture of respect, and making people feel important. As I fill up this balloon, it starts to push out the negativity," Cairnes says. "Sometimes we focus so much on *we've got to turn this person around...we don't like your attitude*. Try coming in from a different direction. Focus on building the person up. *Leader: Sue, I want you to be successful. Here are some things you can do to be successful...Here are some things you want to think about not doing, because they're inhibiting your success...*

Find out what will drive employees to more positive behavior. Say to the employee...*Let's just say you've finished your best, happiest year ever at this institution. What did the year look like – no holds barred? Write me up two paragraphs.* "Give the employee a chance to envision. You may have a loan officer living in a proof operator's body. In other words, the person is a spare peg in a round hole," Cairnes says. "This is a tool you can use as a leader to find out what is going to drive the employee into more positive behavior. If they want something else out of the institution and it's feasible, you can say...*I want this for you, too. Now let's talk about what we can do to get you there.*"

Lana's "Branch Managers Letter" is a monthly publication. She writes excellent articles that will help you better manage your branch and your team.