

THE CHALLENGING EMPLOYEE

All bosses hope to have or to build a dream team of employees who are hard-working, skilled, have positive attitudes, and produce great work. The more likely reality, however, is that at some point in your career as a leader, you're going to encounter some employees who are more difficult to manage. Challenging employees can put a strain on your time, agency resources, and the productivity and well-being of your other employees. Here's what to look for and how to address personnel issues before they begin to impact your team and its mission.

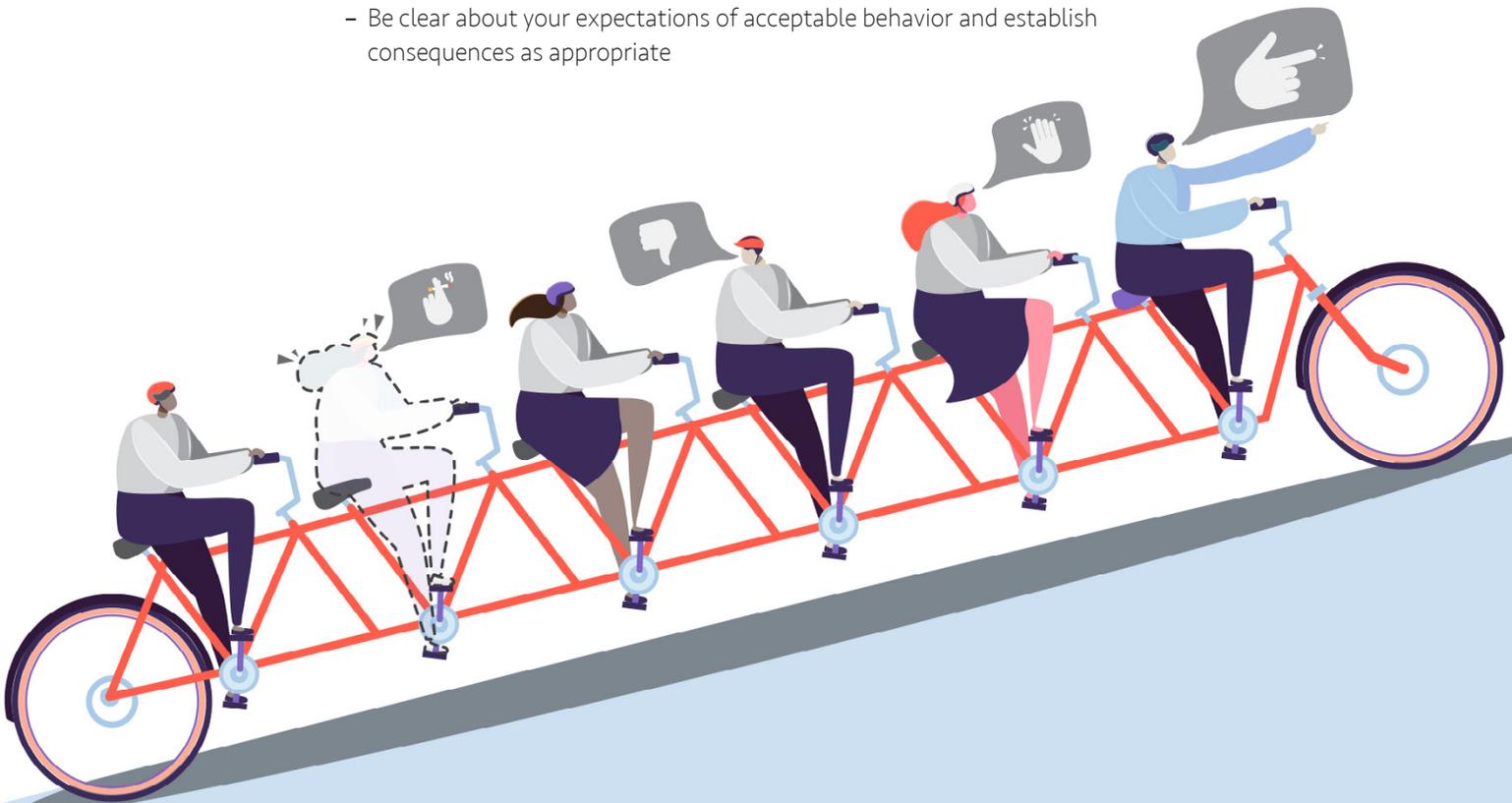
4 Types of Difficult Employee Behavior

The Naysayer

Also known as the Negative Nellie, this type of employee is a master at bursting bubbles. No matter the idea or announcement – good, bad, or indifferent – The Naysayer can and will find something to grumble about. They tend to be averse to change and often instantly push back at the notion of a new policy or procedure. While some opposition can actually be a good thing, a consistently bad attitude can bring down the morale of your whole team.

Leading a Naysayer

- Address the negativity by showing concern for their well-being and then ask how you can help
- Get to the root of any work-related negativity and take action to address what you can
- Be clear about your expectations of acceptable behavior and establish consequences as appropriate



The Victim/Blamer

Victims and Blamers are often the least accountable people on your team. Nothing is ever their fault and things always happen to them. They deflect attention, avoid scrutiny, point fingers, and tend to feign helplessness whenever things go away.

Managing Victims and Blamers

- Recognize that this person likely truly believes that they've been wronged or aren't to blame; highlight any facts that confirm otherwise
- Validate the person's feelings, but don't let them avoid their own responsibility
- Clearly define accountability for everyone - duties, quality of work, and acceptable turnaround time - so there's no room for finger-pointing

The Social Butterfly

This is an employee who spends too much time buzzing around the office, talking to people about non-work-related things. They're not only disruptive, they're also wasting time and money. A little socialization is important among coworkers, but when it gets out of hand, the whole team suffers.

Netting a Social Butterfly

- Let employees know that you don't mind if they socialize, but establish rules for when and where it's acceptable
- Encourage employees to set their own boundaries and let others know when they're not to be disrupted
- Address disruptive behavior with your Social Butterflies; acknowledge any positive intentions but set limits and establish consequences for putting social interaction above the need for productivity

Managing challenging employee behaviors is, well, a challenge. It's a skill that takes practice and almost never comes easily. Start by learning to identify those difficult situations and have a plan ready for correcting behavior and performance. And be prepared to take quick action when problems arise, knowing that you may have to make hard decisions for the betterment of the team.

And remember, sometimes those challenging behaviors indicate a problem that can't be solved in the workplace. Sometimes an employee's family stressors, financial or legal pressures, or even illness can translate into challenging workplace behavior. While it is your job to hold employees accountable, informing an employee that the EAP is a confidential and free benefit can make a difference. If an employee can use the EAP to address personal concerns, you just might see a shift in difficult workplace behaviors.

The Ghost

If one of your employees consistently calls in sick, comes in late, takes long breaks, disappears throughout the day, or seems to always have an excuse for why they can't help with projects, you may have a Ghost on your hands.

Contending with a Ghost

- Have an honest conversation with the employee to uncover the source of their avoidant behavior
- Be explicit about what needs to change and the consequences they'll face otherwise
- Decide whether to retain the employee; is it more costly to keep them, or to hire someone new?

24 HOURS A DAY: 800-222-0364 | TTY: 888-262-7848 | FOH4YOU.COM

For more on how to manage challenging employee behaviors, navigating difficult conversations, or referring an employee to the EAP, call us for guidance and resources or to schedule a management consultation with one of our licensed counselors.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees at no cost.