

Dealing with toxic employees


Toxicity at the workplace can do serious damage to your organisation

FEATURE ARTICLE



Everyone would have worked with a difficult co-worker or managed a trying employee at least once in their career. Toxic employees are a bane to the company. They are like a virus that spreads their counterproductive attitudes or actions to other employees.

According to a survey conducted by Christine Pearson and Christine Porath, authors of *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility is Damaging Your Business and What to Do About it*, 53% of those polled lost work time worrying about the incident and future interactions with the offender. Meanwhile, 46% had considered switching jobs to get away from the offender and 37% reported a weakened sense of commitment to the organisation.

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NEWS FLASH

Highest pay rise expected in engineering sector

Singapore - Employees can look forward to a higher wage hike this year than last year, with the general engineering sector expected to see the biggest jump, said a survey by the Singapore Human Resources Institute (SHRI). The survey revealed that those in the general engineering sector such as precision engineering, were anticipated to receive the highest wage increase of 5.9% on average for the first six months in the year. For the second half of the year, the sector is expected to lead the wage rise once more with a 10.3% hike on average. According to SHRI's executive director, David Ang, the "shortage of precision engineers" and the need for firms to retain such talents could be the reason why salaries in this sector have the highest increase.



Pay packets of top brass in India, China to rise sharply

Asia - According to Mercer's Executive Remuneration Perspective report, top executives in countries like India and China are likely to see a brisk increase in their pay package this year. Salaries of Asian executives can be expected to surpass those in the US within the next two to three years. The report also revealed that the average executive salary is increasing by 7% across the Asia Pacific region, compared to 2.5% to 3% in Europe and North America. Strong growth in industrial production and GDP, inflation and lack of executive talent are some contributing factors cited for the rapid increase of executive pay in Asia. China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia are among the countries expecting to see rapid rise in executive pay.

More than 60% office of workers eye green sector jobs

Taiwan - Almost two-thirds of the nation's office workers are interested in working for companies involved with energy saving products as the market outlook looked positive for the solar power and LED lighting sectors, revealed a survey by 1111 Job Bank. 55.4% of respondents said the "development of global trends" was one of the main reasons for driving their interest for green sector positions. Close to 47.3% cited "global energy crisis" as another reason while 47.8% felt "it reflected the need for carbon reduction". Those intending to find jobs in the green energy sector had high salary expectations - they hoped for an average monthly salary of NT\$47,500, more than the current NT\$40,000 a month average for office workers.

Nearly 95% of resumes ignored: survey

Taiwan - About ninety-five percent of resumes are ignored by employers, said a poll by job search portal yes123. In addition, jobseekers had to send 20 resumes on average before receiving a response. The response rate is only 5% which leaves the rest of resumes unanswered. About 37% of respondents say they constantly wonder if the hiring company has even read their resumes, leaving jobseekers frustrated. According to the poll, after not getting a response from the hiring company, 40% of jobseekers will adopt a passive attitude. Of them, about 21% ponder about the status of their applications, yet will do nothing about it, while 13% of them will forget about the whole thing.



Unemployment to stay high throughout 2012: analyst

U.S - A rebound in the U.S economy is expected in the second half of the year, but the recovery may not trickle down to the job market, said analyst David Mann, head of Americas Global Research at Standard Chartered Bank. According to the recent American payrolls report, the U.S economy added 18,000 jobs in June and 25,000 in May. The unemployment rate has increased to 9.2%. And with the continued vulnerability of small and medium enterprises which account for 82% of the country's employment, it will be difficult for the unemployment rate to dip below 8% in 2012. Mann added that a "skills gap" is worsening the problem.



A toxic employee can be smart and resourceful, but how he uses, or does not use, his capabilities that become an issue.

Toxic employees are not born, but made

Employees are often made toxic by external factors such as poor management or badly planned work which gives rise to conflict and resentment.

A toxic employee is rarely a team player. He often blames others for his mistakes and disclaims accountability. He might even demonstrate his discontent by either doing what is minimally necessary to escape trouble, or pretend to work. Ambitious, he is prepared to do whatever it takes to ascend to the top; he would most likely align himself with those he has identified as important or vital - usually someone of superior organisational status or someone who is able to do him favours. He might even sabotage others by backstabbing, badmouthing or withholding information.

Effects of toxicity at the workplace

Toxic behaviour fractures team morale, performance and productivity of other good employees. Working with someone who is uncooperative and disrespectful becomes an added strain when you are understaffed or constantly under pressure. Failure to deal with toxicity at the workplace is a sure way to chase away top performers as they would feel compelled to find a better work environment elsewhere.

A manager's credibility is also at stake especially if everyone can see what a problem a toxic employee is but nothing is done about it. This shakes the trust and belief employees have in their leader who is supposed to help them to work to their best advantage. The manager would then have to deal with the low morale that such inaction entails.

Detox!

The damaging effect a toxic employee has at the workplace far outweighs whatever technical expertise he might have. His disruptive behaviour is a menace to staff morale and should be addressed as soon as it is recognised.

Determine the cause. Investigate the reasons for a person's toxic behaviour - could it be health-related or are there other external factors involved?

Intervene. The toxic employee should be informed that his behaviour is unacceptable - whether he is aware of it or not. Present clear information about the company's expectations and consequences of continuing with such behaviour.

Treat and rehabilitate. The toxic employee should be properly counseled and given at sufficient time and opportunity to change his behaviour. Better results might be yielded by involving him in the problem-solving process.

As leaders, managers should attempt every possible way to help and guide toxic employees to be professional and valuable assets to the team. However, in this case, the responsibility lies on the employee to correct his behaviour. If such behaviour persists even after all that effort, then perhaps it is best to let him go.



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