

Colleen Kettenhofen

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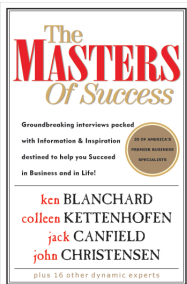


Managing Workplace Negativity: Negativists, Whiners and Complainers

By Colleen Kettenhofen

Colleen Kettenhofen is a speaker, workplace expert and author specializing in public speaking, dealing with difficult people, leadership and management skills, motivation and life balance.

New Book!



Colleen Kettenhofen

keynote speaker and workplace expert, is co-author of

The Masters of Success,

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"The happiest people are those who are too busy to notice whether they are or not."
William Feather

Who are the difficult or negative people in your life? Do you have to work, manage, or live with negativists, whiners and complainers? They are one of the most common difficult personalities in the workforce today. And managing workplace negativity is a skill in itself.

Believe it or not, research shows negativists, also known as whiners and complainers, have a strong need to be liked. They think that by complaining about how much work they have to do, they'll gain empathy from others. Notice how these people often spend more time complaining than working? "Busy doing nothing" is how people describe the whiners and complainers in my leadership training workshops.

It pays to be tactfully direct whether you're managing a whiner in the workplace, or just dealing with a difficult co-worker. For example, consider saying the following to a complainer co-worker, "Chris, I realize this is something you want to discuss, and at the same time I want to make sure I get back to work. It sounds like this situation with so-and-so really bothers you. If I were you, I'd take it up directly with that person. Besides, I'd prefer not to get in the middle of it." Make sure your tone is tactful and polite, yet firm. Usually these whiners and complainers will move on to a more "captive audience."

Managing Workplace Negativity Means Not Allowing The Behavior To Continue.

If you're managing a negative person, address the issue tactfully, yet promptly and directly. For example, say to them privately, "Chris, I want to bring something to your attention. You may not realize it, but when you come in here first thing at 8:00 a.m. and complain about our new policy, it's beginning to look like a lot of negativity. I just wanted to mention it to you because you may not be aware of how you're perceived." They may be fully aware, explain it to them anyway!

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Managing Workplace Negativity (CONTINUED)

As a manager or supervisor, you don't want to be seen as enabling the behavior. Consider the effect it'll have on other people if you don't do anything about it. In managing negativity in the workplace, you have to look at the impact the difficult employee's behavior is having on the morale of others.

If you're managing whiners and complainers, or anyone for that matter, make certain never to criticize via email first. There is no tone or body language in an email message. The written word is often louder than the spoken word. Either meet with the employee in person, or on the phone discussing the issue with them as a live person. Don't leave a message. As a manager or supervisor, you set the standard. If your difficult employee is going to react, better they react to YOU in person, or on the phone, as opposed to everyone else around them in the workplace. You certainly want to leave a paper trail by following up with an email, but don't start off with email.

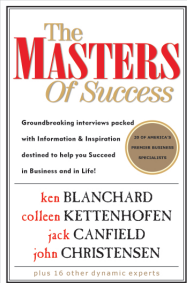
If you're working with a difficult person, but not directly managing them, remember that negativists want to whine to people who will buy in to what they're complaining, or gossiping about. When that happens, you've now got two individuals feeding off of each other. The people who allow the complainer to take over the conversation feel angry with themselves afterward for allowing it to happen. They sense they enabled the behavior because they're "people pleasers" who can't say no.

If this is you, it pays to practice role-playing with a friend who can give you honest feedback. How did you come across? Were you too tentative or too aggressive? What did your body language and tone of voice say about you? In face-to-face communication, body language accounts for 55% of what others believe about you. Tone of voice accounts for 38% and words only 7%.

In managing workplace negativity, I used to tell my employees to be tactfully direct with a negative, whiner/complainer co-worker. As a manager, I certainly did speak privately with the difficult employee, but my team members also had to do their part. Be careful not to internalize everything these difficult people say to you. Most likely, there is something going on with them. As a result, they've decided to take it out on everyone else! And your employees have a right to come to work and enjoy it.

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Managing Workplace Negativity (CONTINUED)

Consider writing your true feelings about this difficult, negative person in a journal. Make certain to leave it in your car. This is not the kind of documentation you would want them to see! When you arrive home, tear up the pages or burn them. This signals that you are not letting their behavior affect you. Because the person who constantly angers you... controls you.

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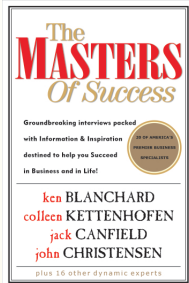
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