
People Behaving Badly

By Lynne Eisaguirre

A recent trend is questions from managers about whether they have the right to "make their people get along," "make someone be nice," or "stop someone from being a jerk." A participant this month, for example, in one of my management classes wanted to know if another manager had to "stop being belligerent."

You would think that with unemployment at a record 9%+, people would be doing their darndest to keep their jobs by being nice to everyone but alas, such is not the case. What seems to be happening instead is that workers are stressed, doing more with less both at work and at home and consequently, they're snapping and snarling at everyone around them.

If you're a manager, what can you do about such ugly behavior?

How to Get Your Troops to Behave

In a word, plenty. As I wrote in my book, *We Need to Talk: Tough Conversations with Your Employee*, there's been so much emphasis in recent years about employees' rights, managers have lost track of the idea that employees also have responsibilities. One of them is to work well with others. As a manager, you need to resist wimping out on this issue. Managers have a right to manage and there's no way to do so if your team is constantly squabbling because they don't get along.

Employees also have a responsibility to work well with others. If you have employees quarrelling like four-year-olds in a sandbox, for example, you can and should direct *them* to learn how to cooperate. As a manager, you can tell all your difficult employees that they must get along with others. If they don't know how, you can send them to classes, buy them books or CDs, or bring in an expert facilitator but the bottom line is that cooperation is a mandatory skill in today's workplace.

With warring employees, you sometimes just have to lock them in a room until they figure it out. (Assuming that they don't have a propensity for violence!) If you're going to try this, you should send in a facilitator or other conflict management expert. What you should *not* do is make cooperation and civil behavior your responsibility when it's clearly theirs.

Employees may quibble that they don't have to like the people that they work with or that their coworkers are idiots or incompetent, but they still have to learn how to work well with them--no matter what they think of their abilities. If they whine that "working well with others" is not in their job descriptions, you can simply inform them that "now it is."