Are You Managing a Jerk?

Are you trying to manage a talented -- perhaps even brilliant -- jerk who has spawned a host of employee complaints but keeps hanging on because he or she constantly closes the sale, shoves the product out the door, or produces innovative ideas?

While you or your boss may think this rainmaker or driver is worth the pain, think about how this scenario will likely play out down the road in this century. Eventually, someone will come along who is different than (from?) him or her. The complainant could be a different gender, race or ethnic background and they're convinced that "The Jerk" is screaming at them because of their characteristic, not just because "The Jerk" is an equal opportunity abuser. In theory, this should be legal, but it's an embarrassing defense if you end up in court. Basically, you bring on other witnesses who assert that yes, "The Jerk" treated them badly also. The judge or jury is listening to this litany thinking: I don't care if this is technically legal, this person is a jerk and we're going to find a way to nail them!

Thousands or millions of dollars later... your boss may decide that "The Jerk" was not so valuable after all.

There is a Solution

Through coaching and accountability, you need to point out the above scenario and give "The Jerk" specific, measurable and behavioral objectives about how to change their behavior. Someone above them, however, needs to make it clear that a failure to change will lead to unpleasant consequences.