

## LEADERSHIP

# Identify and Cure Negative Workplace Attitudes

Positive employees lead to increased collaboration, creativity and loyalty.

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The negative attitude pandemic that is likely taking hold in your office could be quietly cutting into your bottom-line. The virulent workplace virus needs only a couple of nasty-ass attitudes to spread and thrive--if left unchecked you may soon hear the sound of money being siphoned from your pockets.

Research is conclusive--emotions are contagious, especially in group settings. Negative attitudes lead to destruction, while positive attitudes lead to construction. In a 2001 Yale University School of Management study, Dr. Sigal Barsade reported that not only are emotions contagious, but negative emotions will cost you big if left alone. Here are some useful findings about emotions.

Negative Emotions:

- **are more contagious than positive ones** . There is nothing more combustible than a good rumor, especially if there is scandal involved. This leads to hours of work stoppage, whispered secrets and mild organizational sabotage.
- **are more readily believed than positive ones**. We quickly brush off a compliment, but conversely are offended if someone tells us we don't look so

good. We spend about triple the amount of time on negative emotions.

- **narrow a person's focus.** This can be an asset unless you're in permanent survival mode, which leads to less innovation and more protectionism.
- **are unpleasant.** People tend to avoid negative feeling and any place that harbors them. This affects loyalty.
- **lead to validation** . We often dig up blame about the past and/or things that can't be changed or controlled.

Positive Emotions:

- **require more deliberate attention** . We have to go out of our way to create positive feelings. Nastiness will parachute into your office all day long uninvited, but you have to find good things to get your team excited.
- **lead to collaboration and creativity** . This is your goldmine. Positive emotions will bring about innovation to beat your competition.
- **are attractive** . Humans yearn to be around a positive state of mind. A fun and positive workplace leads to increased loyalty.

Prominent psychopathologist, Dr. Bluma Zeigarnic discovered that we achieve our fullest state of consciousness and alertness through negative events. What that means is our brains are more "greased" when we are muddling in the negative and our ability to be critical is sharpened. Negative events turn on the adrenal glands to make us ready and alert for flight or fight. That is often what happens in a contentious company--employees either want to fight or get as far away from the negativity as they can.

There's a Cure

We can all change the way we run our businesses. For instance, the next time you call a meeting that has the potential for nay saying, remember that negative emotions are very contagious.

1. **Listen to your negative employees** . They are going to have a tendency to want to pick at everything. They see it as their duty to protect the organization from the disaster that might unfold if they do not speak up. They can either become your worst enemy or your best ally.
2. **Discuss the downsides**. When you open the meeting, announce the issue you're trying to solve and explain to the group that you want to shoot as many holes in the idea as possible. Give your team 15 to 25 minutes to discuss the downsides of the idea and the obstacles in the way. Keep input on a flipchart.
3. **Focus on solutions**. After this negative session, challenge your employees to find ways to make the idea successful. Keep these "can-do" ideas on a flipchart. Make sure the negative people give input. People have a way of believing their own data--you'll have an easier buy-in.

You've caused alertness to rise, allowing the group to do what it will naturally do-- look for the negative. You've gotten those objections and obstacles out on the table so they aren't festering and becoming lethal inside the company. You've contained the negative so that it doesn't become contagious. Finally, you've turned the meeting around to focus on solutions.