

6 Simple Steps to Dealing with Difficult Managers

The challenge of managing difficult managers can be rather daunting, especially when you inherit them! If they are your own born and bred, then hopefully they would have evolved into great managers!

Experience shows that difficult managers are difficult because they are angry and frustrated about something or somebody (even themselves - especially where they are, or have become, a square peg in a round hole of a job), so the steps to take are these:-

- Always a first is to build great relationships with your people. This involves protected one-to-one time, where they feel valued. Get to know them. 'Getting to know the name of their dog' has a good feel to it! Get them talking about anything and everything that is important to them - this deflects the 'difficult' bit and creates a common place for you to communicate. It also builds all those things like trust and valued-ness etc.
- Get really clear on standards for all of your managers and get them involved in the process. Itinerant trouble-makers usually fall in if the majority do. Do the same with personal objectives based on their best skillset, not their worst. It's easier to get success from things folks are good at than waste energy on things that are very tough for them (in fact, frankly, they are in the wrong job).
- Ensure that everyone complies with these standards consistently and fairly and be flexible if they don't work. It's OK to be a bit tolerant, though only in the 'how' things are delivered as long as the outcome (the 'what') really happens.
- If these measures don't work, it's time to get emotional (no, not tears!). The phrase, 'I need your help...' is a great way to go - as is 'I wanted to tell you how I felt after...'. Both are EQ dialogue, aimed to find out what's wrong and how you can help. If the push back is to 'stop hassling them', then the groundwork you did with the standards proves it's worth.
- After the discussion above, is the 'escalation'. Most people actually want to feel that they are doing a good job - and if they can't, it's time to get a life and move on. This tough discussion will be a lot easier if you've followed the previous steps and it will also mean that you are more protected against criticism. So now is the time to get tough with whatever formal procedures your organisation has. In different countries this will vary, but it requires tenacity and consistency on your part. But, what usually happens, is that folks realise you are serious and move on themselves.
- If they are resilient, go down your formal disciplinary route carefully, but do it! There is a moment when you can say, 'This isn't going to get any easier, how can I help you resolve this...?' Be firm, clear, fair, resilient, tenacious and ultimately realise that their behaviours are where they are going wrong, not them as people. Truthfully, you are doing them a big favour - one which others may well have not been prepared to take on - and that did these people a disservice.

Goodness knows what some folks have experienced in their lives before they got to us - some are redeemable, some are not - sadly, that's life and we can't be responsible for anyone else, after all it's tough enough being responsible for ourselves. And difficult managers are ultimately no different than anyone else - so this can be used elsewhere.

This is do-able and you will benefit from the experience (though some days you might curse a bit!). You deserve the peace of being able to work constructively with all of your people, whoever they are.

Martin Haworth is a Business and Management Coach. He works worldwide, mainly by phone, with small business owners, managers and corporate leaders. He has hundreds of hints, tips and ideas at his website, http://www.coaching-businesses-to-success.com/dealing_with_difficult_people.html.

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