

## Negative people

### *Complainers drain a company's energy*

**A**re you a happy person? Do you enjoy your life...that is until you show up for work and that one person everyone complains about does "it" again?

One of the funny (but only for a moment) questions I ask when conducting an organizational needs assessment is: "Who is the person that when absent, the productivity of the rest of the team increases?" People often find this question amusing (but only for a moment) before the name is revealed, laced with anger and frustration. Sadly, only two companies I have worked with over the past 15 years were unable to answer that question.

I have found the greatest energy drain on employees is relationships. In the companies that I've worked with and for, the majority of relationships can be categorized as uplifting, supportive and collaborative.

However, each company harbors a few employees who zap energy and suck the life out of the department or organization. Judith Orloff, author of *"Emotional Freedom,"* calls these people "Emotional Vampires." While they come in different shapes, sizes and ages, and can penetrate all levels of an organization, their impact is unmistakable. They physically and emotionally drain productive energy from the organization.

I've come to identify five distinct types:

#### **The victim**

No matter what the situation, these people make it personal. They are always under attack. This poor-me shield they wear serves them as they gain attention and pity from others and always have an excuse for never fully stepping into their own power or accepting reality. They typically cower from responsibility doing only the minimum to get by. When

offered a solution to a problem their standard response is a "yes-but." Often co-workers screen their calls or avoid engaging with them because they always have something to complain about and rarely want a real solution.

Set clear boundaries for yourself if you work with this type of person. It's appropriate to tell them that you're happy to listen only if they're ready to discuss solutions. Or simply say, "I can see how difficult this is for you...I'll keep you in my thoughts and hope that everything works out for you."

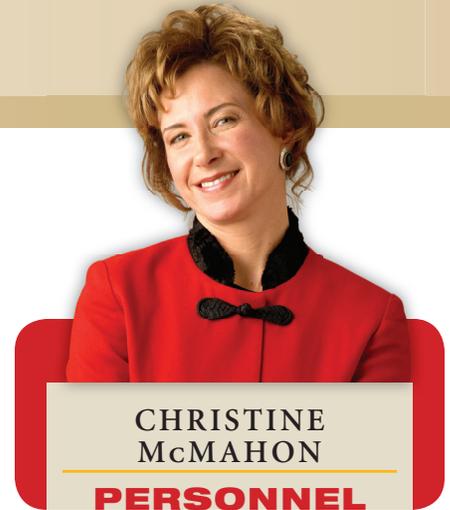
**"No matter what the situation, these people make it personal. They are always under attack."**

Victims can be persuasive and demanding so there may be times when you have to set stronger limits such as, "I apologize...this just isn't a good time for me, I have a critical deadline to meet."

#### **The controller**

These people are invasive and controlling, telling you what you should and shouldn't do in a commanding way. They have an opinion about everything and (think they) are always right. They listen to gain information that they can use to dictate how you are supposed to act and feel. In response to what you've told them they often respond with, "What you need to do is this...not that!" They work overtime to invalidate you.

It's difficult to deal with a controller.



CHRISTINE  
McMAHON

PERSONNEL

The natural tendency is to become defensive and try to control them but this is a losing proposition. The least energy draining option is to be firm and assertive with your emotional boundaries by saying, "I appreciate your advice but I need to work through this in my own way."

#### **The non-stop talker**

You all know who I'm talking about –

the person who doesn't understand that conversation is a two-way street. These individuals do not process non-verbal cues, such as crossed-arms, leaning back, walking away, and even fidgeting. All of that goes un-noticed. Interruption is the only course of action if you want to have your voice heard.

The best response to a non-stop talker is to inject something like, "Please excuse me for interrupting but I need to finish this project before 3 p.m. or I have an appointment and need to leave."

#### **The catastrophizer**

These people can turn an ordinary happening into a natural disaster by exaggerating small incidents into almost life critical situations. They thrive on the at-

tention they receive from all of the drama.

Remain grounded and deal with facts, not emotions, when engaging with a catastrophizer. To illustrate, let's say you're expecting a project to be completed by Friday at 2 p.m., expect the histrionics to begin on Thursday ("I can't get this from Carol, or Mark won't let me do this ..."). Simply remain calm and reply, "I'm not sure but are you telling me that you are going to miss the deadline?" Then wait for more excuses to follow. Calmly point out their responsibility in the unwanted outcome along with how they could have achieved the desired results. Accountability is key to addressing this type of behavior.

## The ego-centric

Life revolves around them. They crave attention and admiration, and have a limited capacity for unconditional love. They also typically lack empathy and live life with a sense of entitlement without regard for others.

Ego-centrics have limited emotional resiliency becoming mean, punishing,

distant or cold when situations don't go their way. They are quite manipulative. Every good deed comes with a price, either now or in the future.

To successfully interact with an ego-centric, it's critical for you to illustrate how ideas or initiatives benefit them otherwise expect resistance or even sabotage. Their behavior, although somewhat predictable, is also very erratic. If at all possible, avoid them.

Relationships drive corporate success. The key to organizational success is having the right people in the right positions with the right systems to facilitate communications and workflow. Negative people drain energy and creativity from an organization. Once you understand their pathology it's possible to de-personalize the situation, and respond more objectively to their difficult and often hurtful tactics. ■

**Christine McMahon** is a business strategist. She can be reached at (414) 290-3344 or by email at: [ccm@christinemcmahon.com](mailto:ccm@christinemcmahon.com).