



Need the antidote for a toxic Employee?

I've worked with several community banks recently – taking them through planning, staff reviews, goal setting, performance reviews, probation decisions, hiring decisions and termination decisions. And while most of the conversations and projects have been routine (from a consultant's point of view) and generally positive, I have noticed a pattern of problem situations.

The "pattern of problems" I'm talking about are actually toxic employees and how they poison teams.

Here are a few lessons about how to work with toxic employees:

1) Toxic employees do really hurt the team - morale-wise and ultimately productivity-wise. The good people on the team seldom bring up the bad or overcome the negativity that the toxic person brings to work. Bad attitudes are truly catching - contagious!

2) Your other employees are watching! They know this toxic person is hurting the organization and the team. They know more about it than you (the manager) knows and they know it sooner. They are watching and waiting for you to deal with it. The longer you wait to deal with it the less credibility you have with the rest of the team. The weaker your response, the less the credibility you have with the rest of the team.

3) By the time you notice the problem or observe the behaviors first hand, it has already been going on for a while. A good coaching program can mitigate or prevent this phenomenon but the reality is, most organizations do not have a top-to-bottom coaching culture or program.

4) Never ever does the problem just go away. Very rarely the toxic employee might quit before it comes to a head, but usually that is after the team is thoroughly demoralized and damaged. Never does the toxic employee just magically change their attitude and behavior. I normally try to avoid absolutes, but I stand by the "never" in the above sentences.

5) Human Resources should be an aid in dealing with these toxic employees. Sadly, in some organizations they aren't as helpful as they could be (no disrespect to my HR friends). We all know we have to document behavior and follow corrective action procedures. And we should. We should have been documenting the problem all along, but if we haven't we need to start immediately and we still have to deal with the employee in the strongest possible terms given the policies of your organization and the laws of your state.

Here are five tips to help you through the process:

- 1) Wake up. Force yourself to acknowledge the toxic employee and deal with it.
- 2) Start a formal coaching program in your organization. It will help you repair the teams effected by the toxic employee, and it will lower the chances of a long term toxic employee in the future.
- 3) Get HR (and/or legal counsel) involved. Do NOT deal with the problem employee on your own.
- 4) Inform your boss and your boss's boss of the problem and your plan for correcting the problem.
- 5) Talk to someone about the problem and how you are dealing with it- someone who is not your boss and not your subordinate. You need a sounding board! This isn't an easy part of your job!