

Dealing with a disruptive employee

Firing won't make the problem go away

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By Fiona Collie

In yesterday's column, we discussed ways of dealing with a disruptive colleague. But if you're the senior advisor and one of your employees is displaying disruptive behaviour, you will have to deal with the situation differently.

One option is to simply let the employee go. That may seem to be the easiest solution, but firing can leave the door open for future problems, says Joshua Zuchter a business and life coach based in Toronto.

"It's a quick fix if you just eliminate the employee," Zuchter says. "The problem is that you're likely to have more employees like this in the future, so it's better to find out what the cause is."

The disruptions may stem from the employee's personal issues and traits, or from a lack of understanding of company policy and expectations. Whatever the cause of the problem, these suggestions may help you work out a solution:

> **Talk to the employee**

Start with an informal meeting and tell the employee what the problem is.

"Give them some specific examples of what you have observed, the impact of those behaviours and what you need them to do," says Cissy Pau, principal consultant with Clear HR Consulting Inc. in Vancouver.

If the behaviour persists, then you may have to become more formal by documenting the problem, says Pau.

> **Assess training**

Sometimes, the disruption can stem from a lack of training or understanding of policies on the part of the employee.

Part of your responsibility as a manager is to make sure staff are trained properly as to what is expected of them, Zuchter says. "If someone is disruptive [because of a lack of training], it really does come back to the manager to train them or, if necessary, to retrain them."

> **Is it personal?**

If the disruptions stem from problems in the team member's personal life, offer moral support, but emphasize that there is still work to be done.

It's up to you, as the employee's manager, to ask whether the firm (or, if you're an independent advisor, your business) can do anything to help. Perhaps the employee could use some time off, or you could recommend the company's employee assistance program as a source of counselling, Pau says.

Tell the employee you appreciate that they are dealing with difficult issues, but it would be unacceptable for their work to suffer further or if the rest of the team is affected.

> **Build a better staff**

Prevent disruptive behaviour at the office altogether by urging staff members to develop their skills.

"Encourage employees to take professional development days to take courses on subjects such as effective communication and personal growth," Zuchter says. "These types of courses will help them learn to better communicate with each other."