

Small Business Owner's Guide

15 Ways to Manage
Difficult People



Foreword

Hi, I'm Nicola.

I've managed teams & led projects for over 25 years, using HR skills & People Management. I assist small business owners to create growth in their teams, showing you how to continually improve your team & business.

I will show you:

- how to develop team members from the day they start in your business
- help you manage those difficult conversations
- show you how to motivate & inspire your employees.
- create a baseline with the right contracts & policies

Using my years of HR & People Management along with life experience, I've established the tools & techniques that really work to create a happy, engaged, high performing team, as well as resolving problems in the workplace.

Whether you're wanting to develop, grow or inspire your employees, I can help you get the results you want. Through review packages, training 1-2-1 or groups, creating downloadable Contracts & HR Templates and offering 1-1 HR & People Management advice.

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Wouldn't your life be easier if everyone who worked for you did a great job, got on with each other, and was never off sick?

Of every challenge you'll have to face when you run your own business, managing people will be one of the toughest. Wouldn't your life be easier if everyone who worked for you did a great job, got on with each other, and was never off sick? But real life isn't like this. People lose motivation, feel out of their depth, have conflicts with co-workers, and occasionally have time off, it's the nature of the beast.

Management is difficult. Some people are easy to manage and some people are anything but. Factor in their different backgrounds and personalities, and managing people becomes even more challenging.

When difficult employees behave in a way that causes conflict, or other problems, it can damage workplace relationships, and it's a drain on time, energy, and productivity, so your business will inevitably suffer.

Here is my guide to managing difficult people and creating a harmonious working environment that allows you to focus on doing what you do best—running and growing your business!

How to manage difficult people

1. Distinguish between poor performance and misconduct

Sometimes this is clear cut, and sometimes it's not. If your team isn't working well together is it just a clash of personalities or do you have an employee who is clearly bullying others? As the business owner and manager, it's your job to decide what's acceptable and to deal with peoples' behaviour when it's not.

2. Talk to difficult employees

Many people find it difficult to have conversations that can potentially lead to conflict, but if issues aren't dealt with, the problem will only get worse down the line. Difficult employees tend to be the ones who are unhappy in their job or who feel like they aren't being listened to. Have a private conversation with them, and allow them to tell you how they feel. This can help you get to the bottom of whatever is causing them to act out or be uncooperative.

While it is important to listen, you have to explain to your employee clearly, calmly, and tactfully that their behaviour or performance has fallen below the standard that you expect and outline what will happen if things don't improve. But it's not just about laying down the law. You've told your employee what you expect, but you need to be prepared to help them reach their potential. This is where the GROW model comes in.

As a business owner and manager, one of your most important jobs is to coach employees to do their best, whether this is by learning new skills or finding a solution to issues that are holding them back.

What is the GROW model?

The GROW model is a framework that will help you successfully coach or mentor your employees.

GROW stands for Goal, Reality, Options, Will (or way forward). In simple terms, applying the model is a bit like planning a journey. First you have to decide where you're going, think about where you are at the moment, then consider the various ways you can get to your destination. Lastly, you have to make sure you're prepared and committed to making the journey, and dealing with any problems you might encounter along the way.

How to use the GROW model with your employees

Decide what the goal is

What do you want to change in terms of your employee's performance or behaviour? This desired change is the goal. Make sure that the goal is SMART-specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-framed. Think about how you will know when the employee has reached their goal, and how you will know when the problem or issue has been

solved. Try to consider the bigger picture here too; does the goal fit in with the employee's own career goals or the overall business goals?

Ask your employee about their current reality

You can't solve any problem without having a complete understanding of the current situation. Ask them what they feel is causing a problem or issue and what effect this is having on them. Ask if they've already taken steps to try and improve the situation.

Look at the options

Work with your employee to come up with as many possible ways of achieving their goal as possible and help them decide on the best options. Don't just tell them what to do, allowing them to come up with decisions is much more empowering than having solutions forced upon them.

Ask your employee to commit to action

Ask them what they will do to move forward, keep themselves motivated, and deal with any obstacles. Decide when you'll review their progress with them to keep them on track.

3. Have strength-based conversations

When you're talking to your employees, what do you tend to focus on? Do you talk about what they're doing well or what they could do better?

Many managers focus on solving problems rather than thinking about how they can help employees do their best, but focusing on employees' strengths can improve engagement and help your business improve and grow. Being critical or offering no feedback at all can make employees feel disengaged and reduce their performance.

Talking about strengths doesn't come naturally to many people, in fact, research shows that our brains are wired to look for weaknesses rather than strengths.

So how can you change the conversation you're having with your employees? Well to be able to talk about strengths, you have to notice them in the first place. Take time to notice when your employees are enjoying their work, and when they're showing initiative, and give them strength-based feedback; tell them exactly what you noticed they were doing well. This is sure to make them feel valued and appreciated. Then think about how they can best use their strengths within their job role and give them opportunities to use them.

There's one thing to consider about strength-based approaches however. If employees are encouraged to use and develop their strengths and they experience failure or a setback, they can become disillusioned. It's your job to reframe setbacks so that employees can learn that failure is sometimes inevitable, and just like successes, it can be learned from.

Remember, your business is only as strong as your team and if you recognise and appreciate your employees, help people realise and develop their strengths, celebrate success and allow for failure, you'll have a much more productive and successful business.



4. Keep things professional

It can be extremely frustrating to see an employee not living up to their potential, and it can be tempting to get involved in the issues that are affecting their performance, especially if you feel like you can help. But don't become personally involved to the extent that it affects your judgement as their manager. Show empathy and ask if there's anything you can do to make things easier for them at work, and point them in the direction of other sources of help and advice if appropriate.

5. Don't focus on winning an argument

Every time you communicate with a difficult employee it should be about how you are going to move past incidents and deal with problems, you shouldn't focus on proving that you were right and they were wrong. Think about the bigger picture. You want to move forward and grow your business with your employees supporting you, not resenting you.

6. Separate the problems from the people

Avoid personal attacks and don't 'label' people as being 'too sensitive' or 'too much of a hothead' to accept your comments and feedback. Making things personal will only escalate the problem and being afraid to confront people means that things will never change. Treat everyone the same and be fair and consistent.



7. Acknowledge that you're different

Acknowledge to your employee that you both have different ways of doing things, but then tell them that you're willing to work with them to come up with a solution that is palatable for you and them.

8. If you need to give negative feedback, do it constructively

Speaking to an employee about their behaviour in an accusatory way will only make them defensive, and you're less likely to find a solution to the issue you need to deal with. It's far better if you relate their poor performance, lateness, or attendance record (for example) to how it affects the business. Are they off sick so much that it puts pressure on other employees or are they making mistakes that reflect badly on your business? Say so.

9. Learn to accept criticism

Sometimes, an employee will tell you something you might not want to hear, whether it's about their opinion of you, how you do things, the business, or a co-worker. Don't fly off the handle, even though it can be tempting. Listen to what they have to say and consider whether their criticism has any foundation. Let them know why things are as they are and that you are willing to take their feedback on board.

10. Set clear objectives for your employees

If employees know their role and they know what is expected of them, they'll also know when they are not meeting the standards you require. Setting clear job and performance objectives will not only help you carry out more effective performance reviews, it will help you have something concrete to refer to when you address performance issues with an employee.

11. Learn to be patient

If you really believe that with some mentoring and monitoring, an employee can change, be patient. Things won't suddenly become different overnight. Meet with them regularly to set milestones for performance reviews and to check their progress.

12. Record everything

Note down incidences of poor performance or behaviour, who was involved, what happened, and what effect it had on the business. This provides evidence for any disciplinary procedure you might want to take and it will also help you to confront your employee with facts, not opinion, when you speak to them.

13. Have a handbook or policies that you can refer to

These should include details about disciplinary action and the procedure around managing attendance. Every employee should be aware of what is expected of them, and of what happens if they aren't meeting expectations.

14. Ask for help when you need it

When you're having trouble dealing with an employee, ask for help. Nobody has all the answers and it can help to get the perspective of someone you can trust, whether this is a friend, a mentor, or a business consultant.

15. Sometimes, the best thing is to cut ties

If an employee is good at their job, but the negative things they bring to the business outweigh this, it might be time to cut your losses and let them go. The last thing you want is to lose other employees because they can't stand working with this person, or to let them make you lose focus on your business. Before you decide on terminating their employment, it might pay to get advice from an HR professional who will tell you what steps might be appropriate to take in your situation. This might help you avoid unfair dismissal claims or a messy dispute.

