

Dr. Die Cast



Passive-Aggressive Vs. Team Players

One of the topics discussed at a recent conference was “Employee Training”. In former years this would have been focused on technical skills such as GD&T (Geometric Dimensioning and Tolerancing), Hydraulic and Electrical Schematic Reading, Robotic, CNC or PLC Programming etc. Employee training has now “devolved” into behavior training. Life habits such as timeliness, responsibility and courtesy have replaced technical skills as the first courses necessary in the development of many new employees. The prevailing attitude or characteristic of many of the arriving employees can be described as “Passive-Aggressive” behavior. An often unspoken response to instruction and/or training amounts to “Why would I want to do that?”

Passive-aggressive behavior is behavior that expresses aggression in an indirect, passive way. This includes procrastination, stubbornness, or deliberate/repeated failure to accomplish requested tasks for which one is responsible.

If you are a parent, you don’t have to look very far for an example. It seems no one’s family is immune from experiencing teenage rebellion. Contrary to popular belief (and some of the “Classic Rock & Roll” songs), it wasn’t invented in the sixties.

We are familiar with team performance in sporting events and concerts. None of us would pay to attend a sporting event or concert where all the participants simply “did their own thing” without regard for the needs of the team.

Who of us would willingly pay employees who lack commitment to the goals of the company?

Are their sources in your locale for pre-screened employees that already have a team spirit as well as the disciplines and skills important for success? One source that might be overlooked are members of the military reserve. Most of them know the importance of functioning as a team and are used to working within a structured environment.

It is important to realize that new employees need to feel a mutual commitment from the employer. According to an employee survey, feeling “in on things” (at the company) rates near the top in the top ten employee needs. Communicating the companies’ goals and demonstrating how that is compatible with the employee’s goals is essential.

So how do you deal with this in your business? Research has shown that sometimes all that is needed is a “wake-up call”. A deliberate sit-down conversation with the employee to explain the consequences of the employee’s actions or inactions can be life changing. One young employee (I’ll just refer to him as Mr. B) was chronically tardy and/or left work early but would volunteer for Saturday to make up for his hours lost during the week. He was motivated but disorganized. I calculated the hours lost due to his work habits and projected them over a year. It amounted to about \$1,500 annually. I brought him into the office and asked him “How would you like to earn an

extra \$1,500 this year”? His enthusiastic response was “Yes!” At that point I showed him his attendance report and stated “Just show up!” He thanked me for “explaining things” to him stating that he... “wanted to progress with the company” and that he “understood he couldn’t do it with a (bad attendance) record like that”. His attendance improved immediately and he went on to become successful with the company. Mr. B. eventually progressed to become a Plant Manger responsible for several hundred employees. (One of his employees told me years later that attendance was one this bosses’ disciplinary hot buttons.)

I once hired a guy in his late 50’s. He commented that most companies didn’t want to hire someone as old as him. Gene had worked for his previous employer for over 30 years when it closed. He was currently driving 50 miles one way to work at a minimum wage job because he would have been embarrassed to accept unemployment. I recognized integrity and a willingness to work in him. I hired him immediately feeling that he would be a calming positive influence on what was primarily an impatient twenty something workforce. He was an immediate hit with his fellow employees and remained there until he retired.

While there is no “one size fits all” recipe for success, we need to be aware of opportunities to improve and grow our companies while meeting the needs of our customers and our staffs.

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