

Top 10 Workplace Dysfunctions—And How to TERMINATE Them

By Roxanne Emmerich

The dysfunctional workplace is a killer—of both spirits and profits. With managers estimating they spend 37 percent of their day dealing with employee “issues,” and one third of every payroll dollar lost due to “disengaged employees, who can afford it for one more day?”

So you've got to kill it first. Here are some non-negotiables that should be laid out for all to understand in new-employee orientation and repeatedly reviewed. Feel free to lift these for your organization so people can start to love Mondays again.

The Top Ten Dysfunctions—and the cure for each

No. 1: Excuses

If you blow it, say so, but NEVER give an excuse. Say, “I blew it, and here’s what I’ll do so it doesn’t happen again.” Or “I blew it and here’s my massive correction plan to make sure I get back on track.”

No. 2: Baditudes™

This is the sneaky one—the attitude issue. They don’t care, they don’t care that they don’t care, and they look for opportunities to sabotage. The behaviors look acceptable on the outside, but you just KNOW something stinks. The solution: having “The Conversation.” Here’s how it sounds:

“I’m so excited about where this team is going. My sense is you don’t share that excitement. And that’s okay. Maybe this isn’t your thing. But if this isn’t your thing, you have to go find your thing.” Draw your line in the sand. Make it known that you smell something funny and you’re not allowing it. Don’t give a list of facts so they can waste your time rebutting this or that item. Just make it known that you BOTH know what the issue is. Every person has the right to have The Conversation with others.

No. 3: Giving lip service to new ideas, then undercutting them in private

Make it clear that dissenting opinions are strongly encouraged and expected during decision making, but that once a decision is made, undercutting will not be tolerated.

No. 4: Defensiveness at reasonable suggestions

Encourage the acceptance of input as a demonstration that someone cares. Defensiveness should be viewed as what it is—an unwillingness to improve one’s self.

No. 5: Pot stirring

Pot stirring is a violation of principles both written and unwritten and a threat to productivity.

Number 6: Failure to clean up your messes

If you miss a deadline, break a value of the organization, or miss a commitment, acknowledge that you have violated trust. Without trust, there is no basis for a relationship. It’s a mess. The only way to clean up a mess is to clean it up and admit you were wrong. Ignoring the mess creates a bigger mess, and trust is lost for good.

No. 7: Deflecting blame

Deflecting blame equals deflecting responsibility. The only acceptable behavior is acceptance of responsibility and (as above) quick work to clean up the mess.

No. 8: The “Nobody told ME” game

You are responsible to stay informed. Whether it is product info, procedures, or customer information, it IS your job to KNOW. Don't wait for people to tell you. Ask. Imagine going in front of a judge and saying, “Nobody told me.”

No. 9: Refusal to deal with conflict directly before sundown

If there is a conflict—deal with it directly and before the sun goes down. It will come out sideways if not cleaned up. Be a grown-up. Be direct.

No. 10. Gossiping and backstabbing

This is the big one. It creates an unsafe work environment and creates wounds that can't be healed. Zero tolerance. Don't gossip and don't listen to gossip—EVER. No exceptions.

Agree that these are non negotiable in your workplace. Dysfunctions go away when they're not tolerated. Most important, realize that you are responsible to make sure that you AND your teammates live by these.