

# How to Deal With A Co-Worker Who Lacks Motivation

Work is a team effort. A successful team needs collaboration, accountability, and support. It's difficult to foster cohesion on any team when one or more people lack motivation. A lack of motivation creates problems for the uninspired co-worker, their team, and the company as a whole.

In this article, we identify the root causes of demotivation. We then go over eight effective strategies to help you support your team and yourself while you work with an unmotivated co-worker.

## Reasons Your Co-Worker May Lack Motivation

It can be hard to get rid of apathy once it sets in. Getting to the bottom of why a co-worker lacks motivation can come from several places. Your co-worker's unmotivation at work can stem from a personal problem, lack of inspiration, or an indifferent attitude. It is also easy for these issues to coincide at the same time and feed off of each other.

### A Personal Issue

Your co-worker may struggle with their work responsibilities because a matter outside of work may be stressing, troubling, or grieving them. These personal issues could be absorbing the effort and creativity they usually put into their careers. A burdensome personal matter could be draining your co-worker's energy or making them aloof.

### Lack of Inspiration

Employees who are uninspired at their jobs struggle working with another employee or the work environment itself. A lack of support from their peers or a lack of resources within their environment can hinder their ability to perform to their fullest potential. If they clash with a supervisor or peer, they may feel dejected. If they do not have access to the proper tools, data, or education, they may feel helpless. In this situation, the unmotivated co-worker feels unable to express themselves, collaborate, or perform in an optimal manner.

### Indifference

Sometimes a lack of motivation at work arises from a complacent attitude. If your co-worker's behavior has been ongoingly dismissed, they may feel as if they can coast through work doing the bare minimum. Employees that fall into this category usually experience one or both of the above scenarios, and resolve to indifference when they and their environment fail to improve/change.

# How An Unmotivated Co-Worker Affects You

Unmotivation facilitates underperformance, which creates more problems, work, and stress for co-workers. Dispirited co-workers often complete tasks at a slower and subpar standard. Whether it's inattentiveness to detail, low-quality work, or a blatant refusal to collaborate, an unmotivated ethic worsens your work-life.

You may experience an increased workload if you work directly with an unmotivated co-worker. If your tasks depend on theirs, their unproductiveness will increase the time it takes you to complete your tasks. You may even have to fix problems they create as a result of their carelessness. A gradual increase in workload paired with having to deal with a co-worker who's not sharing their load can make you feel overwhelmed and miserable at your job.

A demotivated co-worker has an immediate and lasting effect on their team's morale and cohesion. Just like the saying *one bad apple spoils the bunch*, a dispirited co-worker brings a company down one team at a time. An unmotivated employee contributes to a negative atmosphere that encourages a gradual decline in performance, quality, and innovation.

## 8 Steps For Dealing With An Unmotivated Co-Worker

A demotivated co-worker is discouraging, but you don't have to feel helpless at work. Here are eight steps you can take to alleviate the situation at hand. Use these strategies to inspire, protect, and empower yourself while you work with an underperforming co-worker. Who knows, your drive to succeed may be the encouragement your disinterested co-worker needs.

### Assess the Situation

Before becoming entrenched in negativity, it is important to gain an objective understanding of the co-worker in mind and how their ethic affects your daily work life. You'll want to sort things out as soon as possible if your job requires you to work directly with an uninvolved peer.

Assess the settings and frequencies at which you encounter the unmotivated co-worker. Take note of the circumstances surrounding your interactions with your co-worker. Identify small, actionable variables that can be changed to add positivity, structure, or reliability to your interactions. For example, if you have meetings with a groggy co-worker every morning, see if it's possible to push the start-time later in the day.

It is also important to notice if your job does not require you to work with the unmotivated co-worker. If this is the case, it is likely it is their behavior—not their performance—affecting your work-life quality.

To guard yourself from their permeating demotivation, avoid interacting with them for some time. It may sound selfish, but if their performance is not affecting you directly, you should leave them alone. Whether it's because they change or a supervisor intervenes, the situation will eventually resolve itself. Their indifference may not be worth your time and energy.

## Empathize with Them

After observing the situation objectively, it's time to assess your co-worker's behaviors with empathy. Before you start simmering or pointing fingers, take time to put yourself in their shoes. They may be overtasked with projects, battling stress at home, or feeling depressed.

Dr. Seuss famously wrote "When you're in a Slump, you're not in for much fun. Un-slumping yourself is not easily done." There may be much more going on behind the scenes than you realize. Make yourself available to understand things from their perspective and be compassionate. Empathy will help you find appropriate ideas to support your co-worker, team, and yourself.

## Build Rapport

It's easier to encourage someone to change or perform better when you have a positive relationship. If you want to encourage your co-worker to perform better at work, you need to find some common ground. You can do this by being open and friendly.

Talk to your co-worker and ask them questions. You can by asking questions that are open-ended or relate to their interests. If they don't seem comfortable with one-on-one conversations, try to involve them in a friendly conversation or question-and-answer game with your work team.

## Confront Your Co-Worker Professionally

Imagining and empathizing why your co-worker lacks motivation can only go so far. The only way to really know what's draining them of their energy is to ask them directly. When confronting your co-worker about their demotivation, be sure to do so in a way that is professional and non-judgemental.

Ask your co-worker how they're doing. They may or may not open up to you. Even if they don't want to talk about their situation, they will at least know you are available to talk and listen.

When describing their underperformance, use observational phrases like:

- "I noticed . . ."
- "I see . . ."
- "I heard . . ."

And the like. Be gentle, but assertive when describing how their habits affect you or your team. Be calm and level-headed; you won't get anything productive from the conversation if you are flustered or accusatory. Remember, a successful team is made up of encouraging individuals who build each other up.

## Document Everything

It may seem cold and calculated to document someone else's underperformance, but you have to protect your work-life. You are doing this to ensure your work environment stays satisfactory for you. Your notes may even serve as evidence to increase social, peer, or environmental support within your company.

Start your documentation when you first notice your co-worker's change in disposition. Take note if your co-worker seems deflated, and write down what you noticed about their change in their ethics. If your teammate regularly omits tasks, be sure to note that as well.

If they're ethic is bringing down the team, document their specific actions and the consequences that result from their negativity. Don't forget to write down the steps you took to help.

## Be a Leader

Sometimes people don't feel motivated to change unless they see someone doing things or acting the way they aspire to be. Sometimes an unmotivated co-worker needs a role model to step in and energize them. A leader can uplift their peers by encouraging action, giving positive feedback, rewarding progress, offering support, and by even asking for help.

If you suspect your co-worker is having personal issues, you can try to uplift their morale with emotional support. You can make them feel needed or important by asking for help. You can also offer to temporarily lighten their workload by offering to switch tasks with them.

If you suspect your co-worker feels uninspired, ask them if they want to embark on a passion project with you. This could be especially helpful if you know they've been itching to do something at work but haven't been able to.

If you suspect your co-worker is indifferent, you can leverage their performance with a quid-pro-quo proposition to encourage them to build better habits. Be sure to only do this for a limited time. You don't want to constantly bargain with your co-worker to get them to do their work. If you take this route, be sure to decrease your negotiations and offers gradually.

## Talk to Your Manager or Human Resources Department

If you've tried all of the above and your co-worker's demeanor is still affecting you or your team, it's time to talk to your manager, your co-worker's manager, or your human resources department. Schedule one-on-one time to discuss your concerns for the co-worker in question.

To avoid complaining or focusing on negativity, here's how you should approach your discussion with your manager:

## Focus on Yourself First

Focus on how you're doing first. Talk about what you're working on and accomplishing. Opening your conversation with your performance will help prevent you from feeling sour and shifting blame onto your co-worker.

In the event that you are dealing with an indifferent or lazy co-worker, talking about your achievements also creates a measure of progress between yourself and your co-worker. Your manager can observe the difference between the two of you and observe or monitor the unmotivated co-worker.

## Explain the Situation Regarding Your co-wWorker

Explain the situation with the co-worker and how their actions and behavior affect you and your team within the workplace. Explain your concerns gently, professionally, and objectively. This is an area where your documentation will be useful.

## Do Not Enable Indifferent Behavior or Subpar Work

It's noble to want to help your unmotivated co-worker, but don't get caught up in trying to "save" them. Don't justify inadequate work or ongoing complacent behavior. If you do, you will lower the bar for yourself and cause more work for yourself and your team.

In the end, no one can change their behavior or face their problems but the co-worker themselves. They have a responsibility to complete their work satisfactorily, regardless of what's going on in their personal life. It's important for your team's success that you hold your co-worker accountable for their actions. You can offer them support, but you shouldn't overlook poor work or a bad attitude.

## Keep Calm and Carry On

Regardless of how things unfold, try to stay positive. Uninspiration does not last forever. Your co-worker is lucky to have someone like you who cares enough to help alleviate the situation at hand. Be supportive, encouraging, and assertive. It's what great teammates and leaders do.