

Title:

Facing Resentment from Unsuccessful Candidates for Your Job

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828

Summary:

Unsuccessful promotion candidates who remain in the department can make life difficult for the new manager. This article offers guidance for handling this common challenge for new managers.

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new managers, resentful employees, unsuccessful candidates, people management

Article Body:

You've recently been promoted to management, and are now responsible for the department in which you were previously employed. One of your former peers had also applied for the job, and you are now feeling waves of resentment from him that threaten the success of your promotion.

Does this sound familiar? If so, you're certainly not alone because it's one of the most common challenges faced by new managers. Here are some ideas to help you deal with the situation.

Initiate a discussion

It's imperative that you sit down and have a meaningful discussion with the individual concerned. Your two objectives are to find out specifically how he or she is feeling, and from there to figure out how you can enlist their cooperation and help them become a productive part of the department that is now yours to run.

Try to understand how they feel and why they are resentful

The most obvious reason is that she really felt she was the best person for the job. She has ideas on running the department and had been looking forward to putting them into action. Now she feels she has lost that chance.

A lesser known, but possibly even more important, reason is loss of pride. He may have told his nearest and dearest that he was in line for promotion, so now that he didn't get it, he is embarrassed. He feels he will be less in the eyes

of his family or friends. So even though he may not actually mind the job he currently has, you're facing some deep personal feelings he may have difficulty changing.

The only way you'll find out is to ask questions, and then listen to the answers. Begin by saying you know the person was a candidate for the job, and that you also understand they were considered qualified. Then begin with a straightforward question such as, "Do you still feel disappointed and resentful?" Wait for the answer. If it's a curt "yes", probe for more. "Is that something you feel you can work around, or that will eventually settle down?" Or "How can I help you deal with that?" Keep probing until the person begins to talk.

If she takes the opportunity to vent her feelings of anger, listen calmly for a bit, using body language to indicate you understand. Then step in to redirect the conversation so that it becomes productive by saying something like, "I understand you've been angry. However, I know you well enough to believe you can get past it and honor yourself by doing the job you are capable of. Let's talk about where we go from here."

Help them regain lost pride

Before the conversation even begins, give some thought to what you know about the person and how they work. How can you use their strengths to the benefit of the department? One effective way is to initiate a special project with a specific objective she can relate to, and put her in charge of it. It's important that this not be an unimportant "make work" project, but rather something of value. You might even come up with it in discussion with the employee, which gives it the benefit of her buy-in.

This kills two birds with one stone: completion of the project benefits the work of the department, and putting the person in charge provides an opportunity to shine. This helps them regain any self-confidence that may have slipped, and they have a "win" to report to those who care about them. It's also a positive achievement that can count towards possible future promotion opportunities.

What if it doesn't work?

If you give people consideration through this process and then give them every opportunity to come on board with you, and they still won't co-operate, then stronger measures are called for. In this case you must have another discussion.

This time you frankly point out their ongoing shortcomings and how they are

creating a toxic environment that adversely affects the whole department and its work. Candidly tell them that if they can't find the inner strength to change their attitude and make a productive contribution, then there is no place for them in your department. From then on, follow the usual process when someone is "on probation", monitor their progress and act accordingly. As the common management consulting expression goes, "If you can't change the people, you have to change the people!"

In a recent interview with Management Consultant Mike McInerney, he told me this situation arises at all levels. Young managers may be surprised to learn that even Presidents have to deal with the resentment of unsuccessful candidates. The difference, according to McInerney, is that those people have learned to deal with it, and they don't let personal feelings stand in their way. If you are new to the world of management, you'll do well to take your cue from their example.