**Do You Have a Toxic Employee Wreaking Havoc in Your Business?**

**Toxic employees can be detrimental to your organization if their behavior goes unmanaged. Here are seven types of toxic employees to look out for and tips for how to handle them.**

The workplace is a delicate balance. Your employees each have their personalities and behaviors that contribute to your overall company culture. When you have even just one toxic employee, that toxicity can impact your entire organization.

Best-case scenario: A toxic attitude can put a damper on your business’s success, including productivity, employee morale and even your brand.

Worst-case scenario: An employee’s bad attitude can lead to losing customers, a ruined business reputation, [high employee turnover](https://www.business.com/articles/employee-turnover-rate/) and lower revenue.

If you want to be one of those organizations that thrives on a [great company culture](https://www.business.com/articles/how-to-create-a-productive-work-culture/), you’re going to have to pay close attention to your employees and their actions. Here are different types of toxic workers to watch out for.

**The 7 types of toxic employees**

When you hear the term “toxic employee,” you probably conjure an image of a rude, overconfident, self-centered worker – someone who breaks the rules, steamrolls others and undermines management. While these are common traits of toxic behavior, a toxic employee can have a range of other characteristics.

Your employee may fall under one or more than one of the following categories of toxicity. Look for signs that indicate you might have one of these kinds of employees running rampant in your small business.

**1. The bulldozer**

For business success and growth, you need employees who are willing to create and defend their ideas – but you don’t need bulldozers.

Quite simply, bulldozers bulldoze their way through other peoples’ opinions and thoughts to get their way. They may interrupt their co-workers or constantly argue against what others say. Sometimes bulldozers are loud. Sometimes they correct people using humor.

Whatever the tactic may be, a bulldozer’s toxic traits may seep into your workplace. Keep an eye out for these top bulldozer traits:

1. Aggressive
2. Strong personality
3. Always right
4. Disruptive

You may have employees who have bulldozer characteristics. If these traits sound familiar, it’s important that you step in and address the situation.

**2. The passive-aggressive employee**

A passive-aggressive individual is someone who doesn’t speak their mind when they’re upset. Instead, they indirectly show that they’re not happy about something. This can be very toxic for the workplace.

Imagine asking a co-worker to get something done. They’re unhappy with the task, but instead of telling you directly, they make snippy remarks or procrastinate.

Here are a few quick facts about the passive-aggressive employee:

1. Avoids direct conflict
2. Bitter or snarky
3. Makes backhanded comments
4. Puts off doing things they don’t agree with

Someone who is a passive person may be more inclined to bottle their feelings and avoid taking action. When there’s conflict, they may get frustrated and display passive-aggressive behaviors.

**3. The complainer**

Everyone knows this person – there’s always something wrong. They always have a burr in the saddle. You just want to grab them by the shoulders and say, “Lighten up!” (But that would be highly frowned upon.)

So, instead, you let it go until the negativity builds and builds. But that building negativity has to go somewhere, and often it’s into the rest of your team and your company culture.

Here are some signs that you’ve got a complainer on your hands:

1. Negative
2. “Woe is me”
3. Never happy
4. Nothing can go right

**4. The knowledge hoarder**

The desire for job security can be a dangerous thing. Employees who want to secure their jobs may decide to keep processes and business-related knowledge to themselves. However, successful businesses thrive on the flow of open communication, shared knowledge and collaboration.

Here are some undeniable indicators of a knowledge hoarder:

1. Anti-team players
2. Have independent processes
3. Attention-seeking
4. Have insecurities about work

A knowledge hoarder isn’t just detrimental to your team’s morale; they’re a liability to your company’s success. What happens if they leave? Where does all that hoarded information go?

**5. The prideful one**

A prideful employee is easy to spot. Like the bulldozer, they are “always right.” And if they’re wrong, they’re slow to admit it. Look for employees who are hungry, humble and smart, as opposed to workers who are blasé and prideful.

Here are some prideful employee red flags:

1. Slow to apologize
2. Quick to brag
3. Always has to be right
4. Unresponsive to criticism

Pride can be a dangerous thing, and it can affect workers at every level, including management. Business leaders should stay humble and set a good example for their subordinates.

**6. The gossip**

Your employees likely enjoy talking with their fellow co-workers. It’s normal and expected for employees to talk about work and their personal lives, especially since the shift to remote work has given many a peek into their co-workers’ homes. However, a line must be drawn when employee chatter turns into gossip about colleagues, business leaders or the company.

Here are some signs of a gossiper:

1. Always whispering
2. Seems uncomfortable around certain people
3. Talks about others to you
4. Two-faced

Gossip is often an unfortunate but inevitable part of the workplace. People like to talk. And those talks can often turn personal and pump life into the rumor mill. Gossip can bring resentment, expose personal affairs and cause frustration.

**7. The underperformer**

Your employees’ performance probably fluctuates depending on their strengths and weaknesses, mood, and what is going on at work. However, if you have a perpetual underperformer, you have a toxic employee.

In a nutshell, these are the traits of an underperformer:

1. Disengaged with their work
2. Fails to meet goals
3. Constantly needs others to pick up the slack
4. Makes excuses

When one employee consistently underperforms, your other employees must pick up the slack. Your employees don’t want that. Plus, your business can’t handle that long term.

**How to handle toxic employees**

Toxic employees can be tough to handle. Although the situation might be awkward or uncomfortable, it’s important to address toxic employees as soon as you identify them, to minimize the damage they do to your business.

1. **Give other employees the opportunity to speak up.**To minimize the impact of a bulldozing employee, meet regularly with other employees so everyone feels like their ideas are heard. You may set up weekly one-on-ones to check in and nip problems in the bud. That way, your bulldozers and the people they bulldoze are equally heard. You may also consider gently talking to the employee with this type of personality to help them see what they’re doing.
2. **Gather feedback through one-on-ones and anonymous employee surveys.**To help deal with a passive-aggressive employee, foster an environment of open communication. Encourage employees to express themselves honestly. Give your workers plenty of opportunities to regularly talk with you (one-on-ones, suggestion boxes, etc.) to defuse these types of situations. Anonymous surveys can also be a great tool for allowing employees to voice their concerns.
3. **Address employee complaints head-on.**To deal with a complainer, pay attention to their complaints. You might notice that they frequently make negative comments about the same thing. If that’s the case, see if you can alleviate their concerns. For example, you could [offer a flexible work schedule](https://www.business.com/articles/advantages-of-flextime/) to help an employee who complains about their work-life balance.

If an employee just has a negative attitude about anything and everything, you should address it with them. Another option is to talk to a group of employees about the importance of positivity in the workplace so they don’t feel like you’re singling them out.

1. **Create policies that require and reward the transfer of knowledge.**A workplace can’t run when you have at least one person hoarding knowledge and refusing to work on a team. To root out this problem, [create a digital knowledge base](https://www.business.com/articles/computerized-filing-system/) and require all employees to share and manage documents (and other things within it).

Another way you can discourage knowledge-hoarding actions is by [recognizing and rewarding employees](https://www.business.com/articles/stuart-hearn-improving-employee-performance-through-recognition/) who don’t hoard knowledge. Praise employees or offer bonuses to employees who share information with others or help train new

1. **Lead by example.**Pride can be a tough thing to battle. One of the best ways to keep employees from getting too prideful at work is for business leaders to set a good example of humility. Another way to help humble your prideful co-worker is by lifting up the employees who possess humility. This will show prideful employees that your organization values humility and teamwork.
2. **Create a culture that doesn’t tolerate gossip.**You can’t prevent gossip altogether, but you can set a good example by not partaking in it. It also helps to set ground rules for your staff that let them know that gossip and harassment won’t be tolerated.
3. **Work with the employee to create a performance improvement plan.**To get an underperformer up to par, you may need to meet with them to find out why they are falling short. Once you identify the reason for their poor performance, help them succeed by putting them on a [performance improvement plan](https://www.business.com/articles/writing-a-performance-improvement-plan/). Make sure to set achievable [employee performance goals](https://www.business.com/hr-software/employee-performance-goals/) and track their improvement over time.