

How to deal with ineffective co-workers

Not many people in an office environment have the opportunity to work in isolation. Fellow employees are usually a welcome addition to the workplace, and many derive great pleasure from working within a greater team.



Helene Vermaak

Unfortunately this is not always the case, says Helene Vermaak, director at The Human Edge. "Failing to fulfil your own job for any reason is one thing, but dealing with failure as a result of co-workers shortcomings is a tough pill to swallow."

Vermaak says that by failing to hold co-workers accountable you become part of the problem. Recent South African research, undertaken by The Human Edge, revealed that only 20% of people will talk directly to a co-worker regarding bad behaviour and rather than confronting the co-worker nearly 50% of employees will rather work around the individual or avoid the person altogether. "Not holding co-workers accountable leads to frustrated, angry, offended and disappointed employees."

Vermaak says that research has revealed that this is a common occurrence in a corporate environment, and offers a few steps to influence and deal with the situation:

1. Have you held the right conversation?

People who report having "spoken up" have often, in reality, stopped quite short of the right conversation. For example, they'll pass the boss or a colleague in the hallway; make an offhanded comment and eye-roll about a co-worker's actions, then pat themselves on the back for having been "candid." In this instance, you have not held the "right" conversation with the right person. So I ask you, have you and others met with the appropriate individual and shared the full range of your facts, the full extent of consequences to vendors, customers, teammates, and the organisation of the pattern of behaviour you witness? If not, then there is more you can do.

2. Are you open to being influenced?

Be sure as you hold conversations with management or colleagues that your goal is dialogue, not monologue. After you share your full view, be prepared for them to have a different view. Your job is to put all of your "meaning" in the shared pool, then to invite them to do the same. They may have other facts, other conclusions, and other values. The goal of dialogue is not just to change them but to change you too!

3. Coping

If you've done all you are willing to do to influence appropriate accountability, you have two options: coping and co-dependence. Coping requires integrity, acceptance, compassion, and boundaries. Co-dependence, on the other hand, is the absence of integrity, acceptance, compassion, and boundaries. You know you're co-dependent if this

colleague triggers feelings of resentment, powerlessness, and blame.

Vermaak says that one sign that you are not coping in a healthy way is the presence of passive aggression - this might involve gossip, avoidance or finger pointing on your part. This indicates that you are infact caught in a co-dependent relationship with this person. "A healthy coping signal is that you have candidly explained the boundaries you are setting up to help you do quality work and have a good quality work life - while also remaining open to revising this relationship if you see signs of change."

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