



How to manage difficult personalities in your team

The challenge

We have all come across a difficult employee at some stage during our careers. Aggressive behavior, short temperedness, bad faith, passivity... These rather unsociable personalities tend to hinder the operation of the team. Surely, the best solution is to resolve the problem at root level. However, it is not always possible to sufficiently change the employee's behavior, nor to remove him/her. In such a case, it is important to identify what kind of behavior you are confronted with, and to adjust the way you interact with this employee accordingly.

Six typical difficult behaviors

Identifying which type of difficult behavior you are confronted with will enable you to best target your efforts to limit their detrimental effect and prevent it from spreading to the rest of the team.

The symptoms	The profile	The steps to take
• Full of imagination to find ways of minimizing his/her workload. • Delegates his/her tasks to others to do as little as possible.	The Shirker Prevent him/her from creating unfairness in the team	• Make his/her work visible and verifiable, even if this means making it repetitive. • Avoid giving him/her critical responsibilities: tasks on the team's critical path, interfacing with other departments... • Always make him/her finish his/her task, whatever the cost. He/she will learn that shirking is not the solution. • Make him/her assume his/her mistakes. The team shouldn't have to bear their weight.
• Always wants to be right. • Monopolizes the conversation and space. • Denigrates existing rules and creates his/her own.	The Upstart Don't let him/her take precedence over the boss...	• Be firm and present. You are the one in authority. • Bring him/her back under control whenever necessary. • Make sure others have a chance to be heard. E.g.: go round the table systematically. • Don't give him/her too much power in his/her job which he/she might use to the detriment of others. E.g.: no management, recruitment, representative function...
• Only feels comfortable when stepping on others. • Multiplies disputes to have more overall control. • Has no qualms about misusing system resources.	The Bully Limit his/her ability to generate disputes	• Don't be drawn into his/her game of denigrating others. • Ask him/her to account for his/her results (and not those of others). • Don't entrust him/her with any means or tools he/she can misuse for his/her own benefit. E.g.: access to confidential information about his/her colleagues. • Give his/her peers the means of defending themselves. E.g.: clearly state everyone's field of responsibilities.
• Acts in self-interest only. • Secretly encourages deals, special privileges, ignoring the rules... • Manipulates authority, is very good at flattery.	The Manipulator Don't allow him/her to set up his/her "mafia"	• Keep your wits about you. Flattery often hides something! • Make no concessions. Clarify the rules and call him/her to order at the slightest slip. • Make random supervision checks on him/her. • Put him/her together with others, where his/her activity is visible and supervised by trusted third parties.
• Willing and convinced of doing a good job, but multiplies errors. • Misunderstands priorities. Clings to "his/her own way", of doing things.	The Incompetent Limit the impact of his/her errors	• Don't entrust him/her with complicated or informal tasks. Prefer giving him/her recurrent tasks involving fewer behavior patterns to master. • Organize his/her work so that he/she can concentrate. E.g.: set days for each task, put him/her in a quiet place. • Check his/her work regularly to correct basic errors.
• A thousand things always impede his/her success. • The whole world is against him/her: headquarters, other departments, customers, suppliers, colleagues...	The Griper Don't let him/her dampen team morale	• Don't entrust him/her with management activities. He/she risks isolating the team in an entrenched position. • Put him/her in a role involving little communication or interaction with other departments or customers. E.g.: administrative work, production work, regular maintenance... • Separate him/her from other Gripers!