



Motivation, Part II Attitude Determines Altitude!

By Gina Wilson, Human Resources Assistant

“If you have time to whine and complain about something then you have time to do something about it.”

~Anthony J. D’Angelo

Have you ever been around a chronic complainer? It is exhausting and drags you down. It reminds me of a sci-fi movie where the aliens derive their energy from the earthlings. Likewise, a negative person can suck the life out of those of us who are trying to keep an upbeat attitude. If you are thinking whiners and complainers have nothing to do with employee motivation, think again. A good attitude can determine how high an organization will soar.

According to a recent national survey by the United States Census Bureau on hiring, training, and management practices in business today, employers ranked attitude at the top of their priority list. The survey reflects a growing trend that places attitude, including motivation, communication, and commitment, ahead of aptitude or technical skills as the number one training concern in business today. According to Jane R. Elgass, “People want to work in an upbeat environment, and attitudes play an important role in shaping the work environment.”

How does your organization measure up when it comes to positive attitudes? Do you hear the masses grumbling in the trenches? Or do you count yourself fortunate to have just a handful of

whiners? Don’t rest on your laurels just yet! According to Michelle Martinez of HR Magazine, “Complainers and *negaholics* can spread like wildfire...like a contagious disease, and infect even the most optimistic and productive employees.” If you want to keep your employees motivated, then roll up your sleeves and nip this virus in the bud. Studies have shown that unrelenting workplace negativity affects employee morale and decreased employee morale yields decreased productivity.

If you know a negative person, you know what I am talking about. The chronic complainer, the *negaholic*, the person who always has a dour expression; you see this person coming in your direction and you cringe. If *you* are this negative person, this is not a hopeless case. Abraham Lincoln said, “Most folks are about as happy as they make their minds to be.”

Granted, we all have bad days and it is difficult to exude warmth and sunshine 24/7. Additionally, there are those who genuinely have been dealt more than their fair share of grief and sadness. For those of you in this group, I am by no means discounting your pain. This critique is not meant for you. From an HR perspective and out of genuine concern, please seek help if needed; do not suffer in silence. And if you, the reader, know of someone in need, direct them to your Employee Assistance Program.

However, for those of us just hanging out at the whining water cooler, have you made up your mind to be happy? Are you pleasant to be around or is there a little rain cloud hovering over your head? It is not easy to shake chronic negative behavior, but like any other bad habit, we can

change our direction and by doing so, improve our attitude. It has been said it takes 21 days to develop a new habit. So in the next 21 days, I challenge you to pay attention to your attitude and replace negative talk with positive talk. Here are a few positive attitude starters to point you in the right direction:

Points to Ponder and Pursue:

- Most people are doing the best they can
- A setback is not a disaster
- Kindness is never wasted
- Say “thank you” and mean it
- Ask people for things needed without whining
- Learn to forgive yourself and others
- Invest time and energy in friends and family
- Develop strategies for coping with stress and hardship
- It’s true, life is not fair, stop wishing otherwise
- Laughter really does lighten the load
- Do not waste energy on the past; the future is waiting
- You cannot control a co-worker’s behavior, but you can determine your response

“The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past...we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude...”

~Chuck Swindoll

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How to Bolster a Faltering Attitude

The old saying is true – one bad apple does spoil the whole bunch. As a supervisor, it is important to recognize how a negative attitude in one employee can adversely affect the entire group. Supervisors tend to avoid confrontation, though, hoping the problem will just fade away. But with chronic negativity, just the opposite happens. The negativity will spread quickly throughout the organization without intervention.

To deal with negativity, a supervisor must first recognize a problem exists, then try “creative ignoring” in an attempt to discourage the negative behavior. Or, counter a negative remark with a positive observation. For instance, if an employee begins complaining, ask “What can you do to change the situation?” If these two tactics are not effective, verbally counsel the employee, and if there is no effort on the part of the employee to change, then a written warning is warranted.

According to Mary Shurtleff and Steve McKenzie of the Society for Human Resource Management, “Many managers are not good counselors. Those managers who lack knowledge of the proper counseling process tend to view counseling as having a “heart-to-heart talk” on one end of the spectrum to telling someone to “shape up or ship out” on the other end of the spectrum.”

For a supervisor to bring about a change in attitude in an employee, the supervisor must help the employee see things in a different way. “Effective counseling,” state Shurtleff and McKenzie, “is not doing something to someone. It is helping a person do something to herself for herself. Effective counseling will cause a person to change her behavior not because she has to, but because she wants to.” The supervisor must help the employee realize that a positive attitude will be both beneficial for the employee and the organization.

Steps for counseling a negative employee:

1. Prepare; have facts available
2. State problem clearly
3. There are two sides to every story, so listen carefully to the employee's side.
4. Clarify problem. Determine if it is indeed a problem, not just a misunderstanding.
5. Focus on the behavior, not the cause of the behavior. If the underlying cause is brought up by the employee, redirect the conversation to the behavior, and refer the employee to your Employee Assistance Program.
6. Avoid using word *attitude*; it causes resentment and anger.
7. Discuss possible solutions and mutually agree on an action plan
8. Express your confidence in the employee's commitment to change.
9. Follow-up and praise improvement

Negativity in the workplace can hinder team effectiveness, so it is worthwhile for a supervisor to counsel a *negaholic* to become a more productive, positive member of the organization.

Did You Know?

Top 10 Knowledge and Skills Expected to Increase in Importance over the Next 5 Years

Rank	Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills	Percentage
1	Critical thinking / problem solving	77.8
2	Information technology application	77.4
3	Teamwork / Collaboration	74.2
4	Creativity / Innovation	73.6
5	Diversity	67.1
6	Leadership	66.9
7	Oral communications	65.9
8	Professionalism / work ethic	64.4
9	Ethics / social responsibility	64.3
10	Written communications	64.0

Source: Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are they really ready to work? United States: The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Partnership for 21st Century Skills and Society for Human Resource Management*

Sources and Recommended Reading:

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