



PETRA PEOPLE

FIVE STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH PROBLEMATIC
TEAM MEMBERS





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LIFE LESSONS for BUSINESS OWNERS

You may have heard this common quote in business before: "If you can't change the people, change the people."

As a business coach, I'm accustomed to helping leaders and executives work through all sorts of issues. And the ones dealing with specific team members are the most common. The above quote might seem brutish or somewhat flippant, but it's actually an important realization for business leaders dealing with problematic people: Sometimes the answer is to replace a team member with someone new.

Often, I find that, even though a person may be causing specific challenges, managers want to avoid looking at the responsible party directly. Instead, they try to quickly patch the problems in hopes that the issues will eventually go away. While it might work temporarily, this is neither a long-term fix nor an effective short-term solution.

Changing the people is a necessary act for any organization, big or small. After all, while training can improve performance, it's difficult to change attitudes.

Below are four tips on improving the talent management and procurement process to bring in sustained, fruitful, challenge-free team members that grow into leaders.

1. AVOID STRAY DOGS.

When looking at best practices for hiring, looking inward is crucial. Ask yourself: "Have I hired any team members that turned into poorly performing players?" If the answer to that question is "yes," your first step is to rethink your criteria for potential hires.

Stray dogs is a term that I use for hires who don't fit much of an organization's criteria but get picked up anyway. Repairing problematic team members creates additional, unnecessary work that can bog down workflow, other co-workers and even entire teams. To set your talent management processes up the right way, develop a process of ensuring candidates meet your criteria — and avoid these stray dogs.

2. TRUST YOUR GUT.

In my coaching sessions, I will often run across leaders that are too focused on the details in a resume and let that override their gut feelings. It might seem like a smart decision to rely on facts and figures that a candidate puts forth, but you don't fully know the circumstances around those victories. Maybe your candidate didn't do something on his own but rather with a team. Or maybe he created this amazing presentation but only with multiple rounds of revisions from his manager, and you're not privy to that needed information.

Most leaders have a strong sense of how a potential hire will perform, and it's okay to factor that into your decision-making. If there's any doubt about a potential new hire, there shouldn't be. Move on and wait until one feels right.

3. TRIPLE YOUR TIME.

Finding the right people becomes more difficult when there is a time crunch. To thoroughly vet potential hires, leaders need to start early by devoting a sufficient amount of time to the hiring process.

Before the hiring crunch time happens, identify efficiencies you can make in the hiring process. One way to do this is to create a virtual bench of great job candidates. To do this, establish an ongoing process to reach out and vet potential candidates before you need them, not when you need them. Take the results from those initial meetings and create a bench of ideal players for your team, which will give the hiring team a head start, increasing efficiency and reducing stress.

With efficiencies in place, use those new minutes wisely and triple the allotted time for vetting each job candidate. This added buffer time could mean allowing candidates to shadow a team member in your organization or even just taking them to dinner. The extra time will help you get a better understanding of the applicant, and it will help the applicant better get to know your organization.

4. ASK THE "WHO" QUESTION.

Author and business consultant Jim Collins notes that leaders should always ask a "who" question first and foremost — rather than a "what" or "why" question.

For example, a question may be, "Who do we need to pull in for advice?" This allows you to identify the specific person for the task at hand. Your people are key to driving business results, and your job is to find the best "who" quickly by asking that question first.

But even with the right processes in place, let's face it —problems still come up. The tough question, "Who is responsible?" is a quick and efficient way to seek out the individuals that cause issues at work.

Don't hinder your organization's growth by hesitating to identify problematic team members or by repetitively giving a short-term repair to issues as they spring up. Get to the root of the problem quickly, and be ready to make changes.

5. IF NECESSARY, FIRE APPROPRIATELY.

If you directly addressed a team member's problematic behavior but the conversation yielded little to no improvement, part ways quickly. Keeping that person hurts your company's culture and productivity. But approach this change the right way: with communication and preparation.

Begin the conversation by stating the company's firm decision to let him go. Clearly but succinctly explain how his actions affected the business, and, if applicable, let him know that you can refer him to a different kind of job that may better suit him. Exiting team members have more respect for a past employer if leadership engages them in a straightforward manner.

Second, have a plan in place at your organization that allows other team members to feel comfortable with the transition. For example, use your hiring bench to fill any gaps in teams, and carefully explain any shifts in responsibility. You may feel a weight off your shoulders when this person leaves, but your team may not feel that relief. Ensure that individual team members are not stressing about workloads or reflecting negatively about the way the change was handled.

By following these steps, you'll not only improve the functionality of your teams but also help people who aren't thriving in your organization find a better fit elsewhere. Be a leader who is willing to enact change among team members and watch as your organization grows stronger.

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