



Four Seemingly Harmless Workplace Behaviors That Can Destroy Your Culture

Description

Which behaviors does your organization have zero tolerance for?

Certainly, there are some items that will result in a person's being let go. For example, someone is caught stealing from the company, or bullying coworkers, or practicing inappropriate sexual behavior. Maybe an employee provides terrible customer service, or damages company property, or stays out of work without letting you know they are not coming in. I know you can add more. These are obvious fireable offenses. It is clear the company is adversely affected by them. When someone is let go for doing these things, no one questions it.

But here is a more difficult question: Which behaviors do you accept and wish you did not?

Are there other behaviors that are tolerated, even though if they are left unaddressed they will cause serious damage in an organization? The answer is yes. There are actions that adversely affect the company, yet the employee causing the issues does not pay a price. Instead, others pay the price. Here are four behaviors that may not seem all that harmful at first—but when permitted to continue will create problems down the road:

1. Gossip. This is a behavior that can be extremely damaging. It erodes trust and morale and harms workplace relationships. It can lead to anxiety and depression in employees. I find most organizations that have standards of behavior include an item stating that workplace gossip is not acceptable. All employees sign the standards that say they will not gossip. But if we asked human resource professionals to pull up all employee documentation, how often would we find that person is written up for gossip? What we permit we promote.

2. Carrying messages for others. This is another action that impedes an organization from high performance. It shows that people are choosing comfort over character. Great companies are built by those who are willing to "own" their views and opinions. Leaders who permit employees to carry messages for others are subconsciously accepting middle-school behavior. (My apologies to middle-schoolers!) It sounds like this: "You know, I need to tell you something, but I can't tell you who I heard it from." In these instances, reply, "Unless it is something illegal or immoral, please don't tell me. Please let the person know they need to carry their own messages. Please don't carry others' messages." Finally, hold up the mirror. Ask, "What can I do so people come to me versus you?"

I got a call from a department director who was very concerned that two managers were upset with the CEO. They came to her a lot, and their issues were affecting her. I asked her, "Why are they coming to you?" I asked if in the past she had taken others' concerns to the CEO. She said yes. Her job put her in touch with the CEO even though she did not report to him directly. She saw herself as being helpful. My suggestion was the next time these two managers come to her, she let them know she has

empathy; however, if they want it to go further, they need to carry their own message. A month later she shared with me that she felt better, and that those two managers had quit complaining about things to her. This shows the maturation of the department.

3. Envy. This kind of behavior rears its head around recognition. I am not sure if this is grade-school or middle-school behavior. Children may say, “They get all the attention!” or, “You like them more than me!” In the workplace, envious behavior is more subtle. It may be that a person is recognized, and some in the audience don’t applaud. They don’t send a congratulations. Envious people and gossipers tend to find each other on this issue. They connect and spend time talking about why that person should not have been recognized. They feed each other. How much more productive would they be if they spent time bettering themselves instead of envying others?

I recently did a talk for people who work for Cox Business. Prior to my presentation, various people were sharing positive results and recognizing others. While this was taking place, the chat area was filled with “congratulations” messages from the coworkers of the recognized individuals. This is a very positive sign showing Cox Business has the right culture.

4. Saying “It’s not my job.” People who work for great companies do not say, “That’s not my job.” When said to coworkers, this comes across as rude and unhelpful and certainly indicates that one is not a team player. When said to customers, it suggests the company doesn’t care about them. In great companies, employees are always willing to do what they can to help. Let’s say a customer is looking for the place to pay their bill. A person who works at the company notices and asks, “Can I help you?” When the customer explains what they’re looking for, instead of pointing the person in the right general direction, they realize customer service *is* their job. They walk the person to the area, let the person in finance know someone is there, and then find out how long it will be before the person will be met with. They introduce the finance person to the customer.

If allowed to take place, these four behaviors damage a company. Those who do not practice such behaviors will end up leaving the organization. Often the extent of the damage is not realized until those who practice the behaviors are no longer there. Then the extent of the damage comes out. Why did people not say anything? Most likely they felt nothing would happen, so they just learned to live with the person or work around their behavior.

I invite you to read the four examples again. How is your behavior? How is the behavior of those you lead? What are you permitting and thus promoting? It’s time to stop these behaviors now.

Finally, please spend time recognizing those employees who do *not* do any of the four behaviors. These are the people you want to do all you can to retain. The more you positively reinforce your best employees the more likely others are to want to follow their lead.

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