

The McKenzie Mailer

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DEAL WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE BY MEASURING PERFORMANCE

You all know Newman, the character from Seinfeld who is a bit on the two-faced side. He is very nice to some and nasty to others. I use this persona in many of my training classes. In the fictitious case, Newman is a guy who is in a low level job responsible for maintaining historical product data, making copies and assisting in gathering technical information on products as requested. He has been with the company for 15 years; has a great attendance record and all of his files are maintained in an impeccable manner. Many people in the company rely heavily on Newman to get the information they need and they flatter him with compliments. Newman responds by giving people who sweet-talk him special treatment.

His job gives him some autonomy and freedom and he is often seen roaming the halls shooting the breeze with co-workers. Recently, Newman has started to flaunt some of his independence by fixing up the copy room to suit his own taste. He brought in his own furniture and hung pictures of his football heroes on the wall. He has been taking a lot of time to show off his new color tattoo of a bald eagle to his co-workers.

Another part of his job is to assemble documents needed for mass mailings to customers. These documents must be sorted in a particular order and delivered to a group of six women who must work closely together to assemble the information and have it in the mail on a timely basis. The women must rely on Newman to get information to them to complete their jobs correctly and on time. Deadlines are generally met, but not without some degree of turmoil caused by Newman's indifference toward the work needs of the women in his department. The women are stretched and stressed and hate working with Newman due to his seeming uncooperative nature and giving of special treatment to others.

The participants in the workshops are then asked, "What do you do with Newman?"

The responses include: "Promote him and give him a raise. He is obviously underutilized." "Newman has a superiority complex. Send him to a sensitivity class." "Give him a written warning." "Fire him." "Do nothing, the job is getting done." "Tell the people who give him compliments to stop."

There is usually a lot of debate about what to do with Newman. Many people try to analyze the psychological motives for his behavior and treat the symptoms instead of the outcomes.

With some prodding, the answer becomes apparent. Newman has been working without standards and expectations. By giving him a deadline for getting the necessary documents to the women in his department a day or two before the mailing deadline, his performance can be measured. We often tend to over-complicate and over-analyze things by trying to determine an individual's motivation, make excuses for shortcoming or other non-work related items.

In this particular case, the answer is simple, easily measured and gives Newman's supervisor the opportunity to monitor performance in an objective, non-biased way. With this type of objective measurement of performance expectations, tracking acceptable as well as unacceptable performance is much easier. Also, with this standard, Newman knows he is being measured. With measurable standards, employees are more likely to live up to their expectations.

Set a resolution for 2003 and start developing ways to measure performance. If you have no measurements, develop a baseline.

Have a great month and a Happy New Year!!

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