



## **Negativity in the Workplace**

**By Deb Kloeppe, CEO, MSCCN**

As a nonprofit CEO and keynote speaker, I travel nationwide to military installations performing workshops and seminars on topics that include creative career solutions and career management. As impressive as those subjects are, I'm always surprised to discover what military spouses *truly WANT* to talk about, especially those who are currently employed or were previously employed.

Several spouses have asked me about how to deal with bullies in the workplace, how to maintain professional etiquette, how to resolve conflicts on a team or in an office, how to cope with difficult clients and aggressive coworkers, and how to avoid office politics.

Do you notice a resounding theme here? Military spouses want to know how to resolve, mediate, handle, and control conflict and difficulty. **Employers seek this type of worker to lead projects and teams...believe me.**

Why is the ability to resolve conflict so important in the workplace? Professional bullies and passive-aggressive coworkers or team members become liabilities and de-motivators, demeaning the value of the heart-and-soul dedication most workers value and display. Whether the product involves a financial audit or a widget that's sold on HSN – a bully in YOUR work environment zaps ALL of the joy and enthusiasm you've earned when your task is completed.

The residual effects and lasting feeling of day-to-day dread when forced to deal with a slacker, bully, passive-aggressive coworker, or a difficult boss can lead to health problems, depression, and lack of joy.

Notice, I placed slackers in the same category as bullies. A slacker can cause irreparable damage to an employer's bottom line. Overt bullies and covert slackers are both negative influences. As an employer, I'd rather rein in an over-enthusiastic staff member than have to "motivate" a slacker every day of the week.

Slackers, in my opinion, are a type of bully in the workplace. Slackers are normally the "nicest" person on the team and yet possess the ability to slow the workflow down to a halt. How are they able to do this?

Studies have shown that slackers are often master manipulators who utilize a passive-aggressive approach on a team. They're sugar-sweet to the boss and at the same time malign their boss to

coworkers to throw off the workflow of the team. It is a classic case of misery loves company. In short, slackers create personal drama on a team and within a project rather than face the fact they're in over their heads professionally.

There are sure fire ways to deal with slackers, or bullies, or passive-aggressive coworkers, or difficult bosses. In the coming weeks I'll provide proven tips and methods to keep you motivated and educated enough to weed this type of negative energy from your work environment so that you're able to continue your peak performance at work and at home.

For now, here's step one to rid yourself of negative energy created by people and coworkers in your life. **Understand what passive-aggressive behavior is and how it affects YOU personally.**

Determine what you can and cannot tolerate from passive-aggressive people, especially if this type of person has any type of influence over your work and home life.

### **Passive-aggressive behavior**

“Passive-aggressive behavior is passive, sometimes obstructionist resistance to following through with expectations in interpersonal or occupational situations. It can manifest itself as learned helplessness, procrastination, stubbornness, resentment, sullenness, or deliberate/repeated failure to accomplish requested tasks for which one is (often explicitly) responsible. It is a defense mechanism, and (more often than not) only partly conscious. For example a worker when asked to organize a meeting might seemingly happily agree to do so, but will then take so long on each task in the process - offering excuses such as calls not being returned, or that the computer is too slow, or that things aren't ready when the meeting is due to start - that a colleague is forced to hurriedly complete the task, lest the meeting be postponed.” *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*

“Some common symptoms of passive-aggressive personality disorder include:

- Acting sullen
- Avoiding responsibility by claiming forgetfulness
- Being inefficient on purpose
- Blaming others
- Complaining
- Feeling resentment
- Having a fear of authority
- Having unexpressed anger or hostility
- Procrastinating
- Resisting other people's suggestions

A person with this disorder may appear to comply with another's wishes and may even demonstrate enthusiasm for those wishes. However, they:

- Perform the requested action too late to be helpful
- Perform it in a way that is useless
- Sabotage the action to show anger that they cannot express in words”

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000943.htm>

As an employer, I've learned the hard way that NOTHING changes this type of behavior from a legal stand point. Termination of the team member's contract is my only recourse. My first duty is to protect the rest of my team from this type of negativity.

What's insidious about passive-aggressive bullying is the fact that workers who utilize this type of behavior are ALWAYS nice and sugar sweet to their coworkers. Departure of the "nice" person upsets the rest of the team at first. However, team members notice within a week or two that productivity levels shoot WAY up again and harmony is restored to the team once again. That's the hidden liability I talk about. ....you truly never KNOW the amount of damage passive-aggressive people can do within your work environment UNTIL they're gone and/or removed from you personally and professionally.

### **Three Sure-Fire Ways to Detect a Passive-Aggressive Worker**

Look for the 3 "Ps"

1. Pout
2. Procrastinate
3. Practice Purposeful Inefficiency

### **Worker Passive-Aggression:**

"Attacks on the boss or other coworkers are not open, but hidden, and usually only noticed after some time of its happening. This delayed quality makes this kind of aggression difficult to spot, and more difficult to prevent. The passive aggressive person is a master at covert abuse, which can take the form of:

- Inability to complete work on-time or to quality goals;
- Sloppy customer care, by applying irony, hostility or contempt;
- Hoarding necessary information; isolating other co-workers;
- Negative framing; gossiping; excessive complaining; verbal abuse;
- Lack of accountability; sabotaging other people's tasks; absenteeism"

"Passive Aggressive in Workplace" by Knol Company

I am not alone in my belief to fire workers on the basis of their passive-aggressive manipulation of other team members. Bottom line for me – when a problem exists on any work team that prevents a mission or product to move forward due to the behavior of a staff member who's negatively affecting other staff members....rid the team of the problem immediately.

How can coworkers deal with a bully of any type?

1. Document, document, document! Write EVERY abuse down daily
2. Learn what your company's Conflict Resolution Policy is and utilize it fully
3. If your company does not have a Conflict Resolution Policy – ask for alone time with your boss to discuss your written report.

If your bully is your boss and there isn't anyone higher on the food chain in your professional life, it may well be time to find another job. As difficult as it is for me to recommend, you have only two choices when dealing with a bully at the top: go to court or find another job. To protect your mental and physical health, look for another job.

I've quit a job due to a top dog bully – and I have to admit that I felt empowered leaving that job for my sanity's sake. Court cases are arduous, financially draining, and energy zapping. Leaving that bully boss helped me understand my personal parameters of what I can and cannot tolerate in the workplace and, eventually, why I made the decision to be my own boss.

If you discover that YOU are the one displaying negative behaviors in your workplace, ask for professional help. Your problem may not be true passive-aggression, but too much stress or a poor job-fit. When you find a job that more closely fits your abilities and personality, you will find those negative behaviors disappearing, you will be happier, and won't be a liability to others.

*MSCCN is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the employment, job placement and vocational training needs of military spouses. To learn more about MSCCN please visit their website at [www.msccn.org](http://www.msccn.org).*