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“DON’T SWEEP EMPLOYEE ISSUES UNDER THE RUG”

Every organization has performance or behavioral issues that are not being addressed. Managers may avoid dealing with these issues when they feel uncomfortable or ill prepared to deal with them. The consequences of not addressing them, however, are far greater than choosing to deal with them.

Here are some of the top reasons - conscious or unconscious -why managers do not address employee issues:

They are afraid that the employee will quit. They have convinced themselves that they can put up with the "imperfections" rather than lose the person altogether. When they think of the time and effort it takes to replace that person - recruit, train and getting a new person up to speed - they rationalize that maybe the employee's behavior really isn't so bad. A manager needs to realize the long-term impact including the stress created on a day to day basis.

They don't want to create what they perceive will be a confrontation Peacekeepers are to be admired, but in the workplace managers need to be able to step up to the plate. "Let's not rock the boat" is an expression that we cannot afford to have in today's workplace. Having the courage to address issues that are adversely impacting the organization is a necessary aspect of effective leadership.

They don't want to be seen as "the bad guy." The impact of not addressing an issue is too high a price to pay for being popular. When dealt with directly and respectfully, there is little chance that people will not think well of the manager. To the contrary, people are drawn to those leaders who will risk being popular to serve the greater good.

They fear that there will be some kind of retaliation from the employee. If the employee is inclined to be defensive, passive-aggressive or angry, the manager may avoid a necessary conversation, thinking that the employee might do something to "get back at him" personally or professionally. One needs to realistically weigh the severity of possible consequences. If there is a genuine potential for violence, then the matter should be handled carefully, and with assistance from appropriate professionals.

They are hoping that if they ignore it, the situation will somehow take care of itself or go away. One can attempt to justify non-actions by claiming to be "too busy" with other responsibilities and demands, but in a leadership role, dealing effectively with difficult or ineffective employees is the primary responsibility and priority.

The offending individual has a friendship or relationship with someone of influence within or outside of the organization. This creates additional complications, but does not mean that the situation cannot be dealt with. Fear of political consequences must be overcome; these are the kinds of situations that can ultimately lead to unethical or illegal behavior in organizations.

They simply don't have the natural interpersonal skills, or have never learned them. Some managers can be too embarrassed to ask for assistance. Guidance can be found, however, from a skilled manager/mentor, a human resources professional, or perhaps a trusted outside advisor or coach. It is a sign of strength to ask for help, especially when not asking for assistance will continue to have a negative impact on the business.

(Adapted from the author's column, previously published in the Syracuse Newspapers)