

Managing Problem Employees: A Model Program and Practical Guide

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Abstract: *This article presents a model program for managing problem employees that includes a description of the basic types of problem employees and employee problems, as well as practical recommendations for: (1) selection and screening, (2) education and training, (3) coaching and counseling, (4) discipline, (5) psychological fitness-for-duty evaluations, (6) mental health services, (7) termination, and (8) leadership and administrative strategies. Throughout, the emphasis is on balancing the need for order and productivity in the workplace with fairness and concern for employee health and well-being. [International Journal of Emergency Mental Health, 2010, 12(4), pp. 275-286].*

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If there really is such a thing as an 80/20 rule, then it certainly applies to the work of most managers in virtually any kind of organization: 80 percent of a manager's time is spent supervising the 20 percent of employees who present a problem of one kind or another. While they might differ on the actual percentages, most managers would agree with the concept.

This article presents a practical program for managing problem employees that grew out of my experience working with law enforcement and public safety agencies (Miller, 2006b) where "employee misconduct" can have local, regional, and national repercussions in terms of expensive legal action, civil unrest, and loss of public confidence. Ac-

cordingly, these organizations tend to have a zero-tolerance policy toward such misconduct that may be even stricter than that which most managers are willing to abide in their workplaces. Accordingly, as my own work has expanded to encompass public and private organizations of many types (Miller, 2008), managers may feel free to pick and choose from the following recommendations to custom design a problem-management program that works best for their particular organization or department.

Types of Problem Employees and Employee Problems

The term *problem employee* encompasses an enormously wide range of behavior, from tardiness and failure to complete paperwork to bullying, harassment, and workplace violence (Anderson & Pearson, 1999; Blythe, 2002; Casciaro & Lobo, 2005; Einarsen, 1999; Flannery, 1995; Friedman et al, 2000; Johnson & Indvik, 2000; Kidwell & Martin, 2005; Kinney, 1995; Labig, 1995; Lowman, 1993; Miller, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2008; Namie & Namie, 2000; Roberts & Hogan, 2001;

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Sperry, 1996). While some extreme forms of behavior automatically preclude retaining an employee and may well incur criminal charges, many kinds of less serious and far more common infractions or patterns of substandard performance are amenable to change with the proper approach, informed by principles of practical psychology. Accordingly, this section outlines some common forms of employee problems.

Workplace aggression is defined as any act or threat of violence, including assault, harassment, vandalism, or other acts of harm or intimidation. It is important to note that overt aggression is often the end-point of a downward behavioral spiral that begins with other problem behaviors at work.

Workplace misconduct typically involves violation of rules regarding time schedules, conduct, workplace relationships, dishonest and corrupt behavior, and other nonviolent infractions. Note, however, that the dividing line between this category and the previous one can be quite fluid; for example, is “creating a hostile environment” by a male employee’s wordlessly salacious leering at a female coworker a form of misconduct, harassment, or other category of problem behavior? Is threatening one’s assistant with onerous duty to muzzle him regarding the supervisor’s bill-skimming scheme a form of bullying, harassment, intimidation, or theft – or all of the above? In general, the sooner such problems are addressed and corrected, the less chance they have of mushrooming out of control.

Marginal performance generally refers to “sins of omission,” and includes such infractions as tardiness and absences, failure to complete work assignments, misuse of company equipment and property, insubordination and problems with chain of command, passive violation of company rules and safety guidelines, poor customer relations, unprofessional behavior, and special infractions related to an individual job.

We might also take a moment to consider what makes a *good* employee (Blustein, 2006; Buckingham, 2005; Casciaro & Lobo, 2005; Collins, 2001; Ferris et al, 2000; Flin, 1996; Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Lerbinger, 1997; Lowman, 1993; Miller, 2003, 2008; O’Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Roberts & Hogan, 2001; Sewell, 1992; Sperry, 1996; Stone, 2007; Yandrick, 1996). For virtually all jobs, and especially for occupations that involve any kind of independent judgment or decision-making, there is a need for employees and supervisors who possess good overall intelligence, especially abstract reasoning, mental flexibility, interpersonal creativity, and problem-solving skills. Other related positive traits and

qualities include psychological maturity, common sense, reliability, conscientiousness, and the ability to apply discretion in an ethical and equitable manner. Leaders, supervisors, and higher-ranking managers should be mature, seasoned individuals with a well-developed sense of integrity and professionalism. The challenge for all organizations and industries is to find or develop selection and training protocols that can accurately identify, predict, and develop these positive traits.

Bad Employee to Good Employee: Practical Solutions and Strategies

There are a number of points along the process of hiring, training, and retaining employees that solutions to workplace misconduct can be applied. Indeed, for most workplaces, it is far easier and more economical to salvage a basically good employee with a few correctible faults than to jettison him or her and then recruit and train a replacement. The key is to separate out the more common not-so-bad employee from the minority who are truly irredeemable.

Different employees are dysfunctional for different reasons, and organizations therefore need to develop an integrated system of interventions to target different groups of employees at different phases of their careers. Importantly, interventions must address not just personality characteristics and individual behavior, but the organizational practices of the companies in which the employees work. Management can hardly model unfair or corrupt behavior and then expect their workers to behave honorably. Executives and managers must provide the example they want their employees to emulate.

The following is a step-by-step model of employee selection, training, coaching, counseling, and managing that I have developed for public safety agencies and that can be adapted for organizations of all types, including public companies, government agencies, private corporations, healthcare facilities, and small-to-medium businesses (Miller, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008). The different stages should be thought of less as linear rungs on a ladder than an array of cyclic flywheels, each phase shading into the next and drawing from the ones that precede it.

Selection and Screening

The best way to prevent employee misconduct is not to hire misconduct-prone applicants in the first place. If only

it were that simple. It's surprising how few organizations outside law enforcement, public safety, and some government agencies, employ any kind of formal psychological or informal behavioral screening measures of their respective employees. Other companies contract with self-styled selection service providers who employ questionably valid screening measures and procedures. However, any hiring manager can use his or her brain and a few psychologically-informed principles of common sense to weed out job candidates that have "TROUBLE" scrawled across their foreheads.

Basic *screening-out* red flags include drug or alcohol abuse, a serious or extensive criminal history, evidence of past repeated conflicts with authority, misconduct or poor performance in former jobs, chronic financial problems, or a spotty and inconsistent work record. A particularly important feature of the evaluation is the candidate's style of handling anger and frustration, both in the past and presently.

Screening-in protocols should assess not just behavioral styles and character traits, but the potential for learning from both formal training and on-the-job experience. As noted earlier, traits to look for include good overall intelligence and problem-solving ability, emotional maturity, good communication skills, reliability, conscientiousness, and the ability to use discretion and independent thinking in a fair and ethical manner. Many of these traits, or their absence, will have emerged during a careful pre-employment interview.

Yet even the best screening protocols and interviews are really only behavioral snapshots of the employee's psychological qualifications at the beginning of his or her career with the company. Even the best pre-employment screening protocol cannot necessarily anticipate emotional and psychological problems that may develop during an employee's tenure with that company. Ideally, then, periodic evaluations and reassessments should be a regular component of an employee's progress. Such reassessments should be balanced with fair and effective monitoring, training, and supervision throughout the employee's span of employment (Buckingham, 2005; Garner, 1995).

Education and Training

This includes not just training for the specific job description (bookkeeper, machine operator, stock manager, salesperson, medical technician), but training in the necessary "people skills" that make a workplace congenial or distressing to work in. Certain interpersonal skills and qualities are

largely innate: you either have them or you don't. Many skills, however, can be taught, albeit to varying degrees that depend on the potential and willingness of the individual. Given the impact that interpersonal behavior has on employee satisfaction and productivity, it is surprising how many companies leave this dimension to chance. Notable exceptions include service industries, such as hospitality or sales, where acting cordially is part of the uniform because it directly affects customer satisfaction and the bottom line. But why not apply these principles to all companies to make them more pleasant places to work?

Skeptical managers should note that this type of interpersonal skills training need not be complicated or expensive. The general models employed by most trainers who consult to service-industry businesses and organizations are based on principles of adult learning that involve a combination of didactic instruction, behavioral participation, simulated scenarios, and role playing. The emphasis is on developing a range of psychosocial and communication skills that assume frequent – and potentially unpleasant – interactions between customers and employees. Such exercises focus on anticipating problems before they arise and utilizing a range of flexible problem-solving conflict-resolution strategies to defuse problems before they explode into crises.

But formal training goes only so far. Much teaching, experience, and socialization of new employees occurs on the job under the guidance and influence of immediate supervisors who transmit and model the *corporate culture* of that organization (Collins, 2001; O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006). Training thus has an important attitudinal component: it socializes employees into their respective organizations and inculcates organizational philosophies, values, and expectations. These seeming "intangibles" have great impact on employees' behavior, something managers should always be mindful of as they interact with their staff on a daily basis.

Coaching and Counseling

Coaching and counseling may be considered more focused and individualized applications of education and training that directly address a particular employee's problematic behavior in the context of a supervisory session. Coaching and counseling both require constructive confrontation of the problem employee's behavior, but it is important to realize that such confrontation need not – indeed, should

not – ever be gratuitously hostile, offensive, or demeaning. Professionalism and respect can characterize the interaction of a superior with a subordinate in any supervisory setting, including coaching, counseling, discipline, or even termination. The focus is on correcting the problem behavior, not bashing the employee. Supervisors should be firm but civil, preserving the dignity of all involved.

Coaching

The difference between coaching and counseling lies in their focus and emphasis. *Coaching* deals directly with identifying and correcting problematic behaviors. It is concerned with the operational reasons those behaviors occur and with developing specific task-related strategies for improving performance in those areas. Most of the direction and guidance in coaching comes from the supervisor, and the main task of the supervisee is to understand and carry out the prescribed corrective actions. For example, a quality assurance inspector who fails to complete reports on time is given specific deadlines for such paperwork as well as guidance on how to word reports so that they don't become too overwhelming. A restaurant waiter who behaves discourteously with customers is provided with specific scenarios to role-play in order to develop a repertoire of responses for maintaining his or her dignity without offending the eatery's patrons.

One useful model of coaching is adapted from the no-nonsense world of law enforcement and public safety (Engel, 2002; Garner, 1995; Miller, 2006b; Peak et al, 2004; Robinette, 1987; Sewell, 1992; Thibault et al, 2004), where breaches of communication and conduct can have serious and far-reaching consequences for both the department and the community; similar models have been developed specifically for the corporate world (Stone, 2007). Productively applied to the broad universe of organizational supervision, this protocol can be divided into five basic stages:

Identify and define the problem. This assures that the manager and the employee are on the same page and prevents any misunderstanding from the outset:

“There have been four customer complaints filed against you for discourteous behavior in the past six months.”

State the effect of the problem. This objectifies the situation, providing the employee with a general rule of behavior that applies to everyone. That way, the employee can't accuse the manager of singling him or her out for personal reasons.

“When customers experience our staff as unpleasant to work with, they'll want to take their business elsewhere. In addition, they tell other people, which hurts our business still further. Lost business means fewer raises and bonuses and possibly staff cuts. It also makes the atmosphere generally less pleasant to work in. As you recall from our new-hire orientation, courteous speech and behavior are part of the ‘uniform’ we all wear when we're at work.”

Describe the desired action. The manager should be crystal clear about what he or she expects the employee to do. The instruction should be repeated as many times and in as many ways as necessary to be sure the employee understands it. It's amazing how people hear what they want to hear, so the manager's directive should leave as little room for ambiguity as possible:

“There seem to be some common threads in these complaints. Let's review some of these situations and see if we can come up with better responses. You can utilize the suggestions we discuss here or feel free to come up with ideas of your own, but the bottom line is, your style of interaction with customers has to change.” [Supervisor and employee review specific scenarios and discuss alternative responses, using discussion and role-play as needed.]

Make it attractive: motivate the employee. Although it may sound like a cliché, the manager should try to make the coaching session seem more like an opportunity and less like a punishment. Employees will take correction and stick to the program to the extent that they feel they have something to gain from doing so – i.e. managers should try to inculcate employee *buy-in*.

“We appreciate your efforts to be an aggressive, meticulous, high-producing sales rep and we know that better customer relations means more business, which is better for everyone. People like doing business with reps who make them feel comfortable and welcome. These ways we've discussed of interacting with customers should help you shoot your numbers even higher.”

Document and summarize. Again, nothing should be left to chance. If a repeat coaching session is necessary, it

will be essential to have written confirmation of what the manager and the employee already discussed and agreed on.

“Okay, I’m writing down here that we reviewed this and that we both agree that you’re going to make these changes.”

Counseling

Counseling differs from coaching in two main ways. First, it is less task-focused and more supportive, empathic, non-directive, and non-evaluative; it seeks to understand the broader reasons underlying the problematic behavior. This is especially appropriate when the difficulty lies less in a specific action or infraction and more in the area of attitudes and style of relating, where there may be a general factor accounting for a range of specific problem behaviors. Second, counseling is less top-down directive than coaching, and puts more of the burden of change on the supervisee, encouraging the employee to creatively develop his or her own solutions to the problem. In the counseling approach, much of the feedback to the supervisee may occur in the form of *reflective statements*, so that a kind of Socratic dialogue emerges, moving the supervisee increasingly in the direction of constructive problem solving:

Manager: Do you know why I asked to speak with you today?

Employee: Well, I guess there have been some complaints about me.

[Discussion continues about the nature of the complaints and their consequences]

Manager: I see you’ve been here three years with a pretty good record. What’s been going on lately?

Employee: I dunno, maybe the job’s getting to me. Ever since the 2005 downsizing and last February’s robbery, it’s like everything seems to drag. And the customers seem more of a pain in the butt than ever. There are fewer big deals these days and more of them seem to be these nickel-and-dime small business operations. Every little thing seems to tick me off. Oh yeah, and things at home haven’t been going that great, either.

[Some further discussion ensues about job and personal problems]

Manager: Well, I’m glad you told me that, and I understand things have been rough the past couple of months, but I’m sure you understand that we need to maintain a certain standard of professionalism. I’m going to refer you to our EAP for some counseling to help you get your bearings. In the meantime, I’d like you to take the next few days to think of some ways you can improve how you’re interacting with the customers. Jot them down, in fact, and we’ll meet next time to discuss this further. You do your part, and we’ll help you get through this, agreed?

Employee: Okay, I’ll try.

Manager: Well, I need you to do more than try, because the situation does have to change. So get back to me with some specifics next week and we’ll take it from there, okay?

Employee: Okay.

Discipline

If educative, coaching, and counseling measures have been ineffective, some form of disciplinary action, ranging from an official reprimand, to suspension, to termination may be indicated. Good discipline begins with proactive assessment and monitoring of the employee’s behavior to detect precursors and patterns of misconduct, so that interventions can be applied as early as possible. Many companies are too lax in this regard, not realizing that disregarding seemingly minor misbehaviors is a perfect way of abetting and encouraging larger transgressions down the road.

The opposite problem in many organizations is an overly heavy-handed approach to discipline in an attempt to enforce zero-tolerance policies. But zero-tolerance for bad behavior doesn’t mean zero-humanity in dealing with the employee. Discipline should be consistent, impartial, immediate, and definitive – but not cruel or vindictive. Ideally, the goal should be to stop the misbehavior, while salvaging an otherwise effective employee. To this end, interventions should be step-wise and targeted to the specific problem.

Practical Discipline

Again, like all categories, the boundaries between coaching, counseling, and discipline are elastic and interac-

tive (Grote, 1995; Serpas et al, 2003; Stone, 2007; Weitzel, 2004). One disciplinary protocol, adapted to the corporate world from the domain of law enforcement and public safety (Garner, 1995), specifies the following set of five basic principles of corrective action that should undergird any effective disciplinary interview.

Have the required administrative support before taking corrective action. For discipline to be effective, the manager must be able to back it up. To begin with, he or she should be working from a standard Policies and Procedures manual that specifies fair and equal rules for all employees. The manager should also have the backing of his or her supervisors to use appropriate managerial discretion and authority in handling the matter.

Have as much background information as possible and know the full story. Few things so erode the effectiveness of workplace discipline as being uninformed and unprepared. You may never be able to know everything, but whatever you can find out about the incident or pattern in question will bolster the manager's authority and leave the employee little wiggle room to manipulate the situation. It also shows that the manager is doing everything possible to be thorough and fair because this is important enough for him or her to have taken the time to thoroughly investigate the matter.

Know the employee as well as possible. This is a corollary to the above principle, but a little broader. A good manager should always strive to know the people he or she works with – not just to analyze or “psyche them out,” but to know them as *people*, because then it's much easier to tailor an approach to them as individuals when coaching, counseling, or disciplining them is necessary (Miller, 2003, 2008).

Frame constructive criticism in a supportive context. It's important to raise some good points, not just the bad (Weisinger, 2000). One suggestion is to sandwich any criticism between two slices of praise:

“I know you're trying to keep your orders moving and we appreciate that, but some of our customers are feeling like you're rushing them through their meals, so we have to work on lightening up the intensity. And most of the customers appreciate your not making them have to keep asking for their drink refills.”

Try to obtain agreement, commitment, and buy-in from the employee – but don't be afraid to pull rank when you have

to. In the best case, the employee will feel like the final solution is his or her decision, as well as the manager's. That's why it's important for the manager to first ask if the employee has any ideas of their own about correcting the problem. Then they can work on them together to come up with the best solution. In some cases, however, the employee will just stare blankly or actively protest the manager's suggestions; then he or she has to make it clear that, ultimately, the manager has the last say and it's up to the employee to comply.

Psychological Fitness-For-Duty Evaluations

Where it is suspected that personal traits, disorders, or stress reactions are causing or contributing to an employee's problem behavior, a formal *psychological fitness for duty* (FFD) evaluation may be ordered to (1) determine if the employee is psychologically capable of continuing to fulfill his or her job requirements; (2) if not, then what measures, if any, are recommended to make him or her more effective and able to function up to the standards of the organization; and (3) what kinds of reasonable accommodations, if any, must be in place to permit the employee to work in spite of the residual disabilities. The FFD evaluation thus combines elements of risk management, mental health intervention, labor law, and departmental discipline (Stone, 2000).

For example, under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), for positions that involve public safety workers, such as police, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel, courts have generally tended to afford greater discretion to employers seeking to require a psychological FFD evaluation if there is a potential for that worker's impaired mental state to put the public at risk. This applies as well to medical personnel, transportation workers, security personnel, and those who work with children. One primary factor in such FFD assessments is concern for liability, such as claims of negligent hiring, negligent retention, negligent supervision, and so on; these issues are endemic in the public and private employee sector. However, for most other jobs that don't involve critical safety issues, managers should consult with their business attorneys before ordering any kind of formal psychological examination.

The following will summarize the main points necessary for managers to understand about the basic components of a psychological FFD evaluation (Rostow & Davis, 2004; Stone, 2000).

Identifying data. The employee's name, identifying demographics, departmental referral information, name of the evaluator, and dates of the evaluation.

Reason for evaluation. The main incidents, issues, and referral question(s) that have led the employee to the examining psychologist's office. The focus of the evaluation itself should be specific to the work-related question at hand.

Background information. The information in this section can be narrow or broad but, again, the scope and range of such background data should be defined by their relevance to the referral question(s). For example, conflicts with previous employers may be relevant; history of marital infidelity may not.

Clinical interview and behavioral observations. As with all clinical evaluations, much useful information can be gleaned about a subject from a good clinical interview. How the subject answers questions and how he or she generally behaves is just as important as what he or she says.

Review of records. Depending on the individual case, the volume of pertinent records can range from a few sheets to literally cartons of documents. The psychologist's challenge is to distill this raw data in order to summarize the main points necessary to form a conclusion.

Psychological test findings. Not all FFD evaluations will include psychometric tests but, where they do, the measures administered should be relevant to the job-related question being asked. Usually, the basic areas covered include: general intelligence; cognitive functioning (attention, concentration, memory, reasoning); personality functioning; assessment of mood; and screening for psychotic symptoms.

Conclusions and discussion. This section should be a succinct summary of the main points relevant to the FFD question(s), with documentation of the psychologist's reasoning on each point. For example:

“Psychological test findings are essentially within normal limits, with the exception of a tendency to disregard rules and conventions and to responding impulsively under stress. This is supported by the employee's statement that ‘If I know the policy is wrong, it's my responsibility to do it the right way.’ This is further corroborated by records indicating three prior disciplinary actions in his present

department, and at least one prior suspension in his previous job.

“Overall findings are consistent with an employee of average intelligence, no major mental disorder, high ability and skill in certain job-related areas (financial figures and spread sheets), but with a long-standing tendency to disobey authority and respond impulsively, but not violently, under conditions of stress.”

Recommendations. This is perhaps the most challenging section of the report, because here the psychologist has to boil the findings down to specific recommendations that the manager can understand and utilize and that may affect this employee's entire career. There are several possible outcomes to an FFD evaluation (Rostow & Davis, 2004; Stone, 2000):

Unfit for duty. The employee is unfit for duty and is not likely to become fit in the foreseeable future, with or without psychological treatment. Examples include the effects of a traumatic brain injury, a longstanding severe personality disorder, or a substance abuse problem that continues to get worse.

Unfit but treatable. The employee is currently unfit, but the problems appear to be amenable to treatment that will restore him or her to fitness in a reasonable amount of time. For example, a depressed, alcoholic employee agrees to enter a 12-step abstinence program, attend psychotherapy sessions, and take prescribed antidepressant medication as needed. Following the recommended course of treatment, the employee will usually be referred for a *post-treatment evaluation* to assess if he or she is now fit to resume his or her duties.

No psychological diagnosis. There is nothing in the results of the psychological FFD evaluation to suggest that the employee's unfitness for duty is related to a psychological disorder or mental health diagnosis per se. In such cases, the employee will usually be referred back for administrative coaching or counseling, further education and training, or disciplinary action.

Invalid evaluation. The employee has failed to cooperate with the evaluation, has not been truthful, and/or has shown malingering or other response manipulation on interview or psychological tests. Again, he or she will usually be referred back to management for further administrative action.

Mental Health Services

One of the purposes of an FFD evaluation is to make recommendations for education, retraining, counseling, or treatment. Unfortunately, referral of employees for mental health services when their job performance has begun to deteriorate is often viewed as punishment within a disciplinary context, rather than as a proactive human resource intervention that might forestall further problems and help contribute to that employee's better job performance and overall health. This is especially likely if the referral for counseling follows a particularly unpleasant and contentious psychological FFD evaluation.

Ideally, the goal of company-referred psychological treatment should be to use the minimum depth and intensity of intervention necessary to restore the employee to her adequate baseline functioning or to modify a pre-existing pattern of problem behavior that interferes with her work role. In some cases, when a certain level of clinical trust and comfort has been established, employees may later opt for further, more extensive individual or family therapy to work on personal issues of special concern to them, once the original departmentally-referred issue has been resolved (Lowman, 1993; Miller, 2008; Quick et al, 1997; Sperry, 1996).

The best use of psychological services is to recommend counseling to troubled employees well before the situation rises to the level of a disciplinary action. Many employees are actually glad to be afforded this option once they have been given the endorsement by a manager to see the psychologist without stigma, especially if they trust that this supervisor has their best interests at heart. As with most recommendations, the more buy-in obtained from the employee, the more likely the process is to be successful.

Termination

Unfortunately, not every problem employee can be salvaged. Despite all reasonable efforts at training, coach-

ing, counseling, psychological services, and constructive discipline, employees who are persistently and uncorrectibly underperforming or misbehaving must be terminated. In some cases, such as theft, vandalism, or violence, formal legal charges may have to be brought. If things have progressed to this point, discipline should be consistent, impartial, immediate, and definitive. The weeding out of the few truly bad employees is a fundamental prerequisite for the ability of the many good employees to serve their companies and the public with skill and dedication (Albrecht, 1996; Friedman et al, 2000; Johnson & Indvik, 2000; Mitroff, 2001; Namie & Namie, 2000). If it comes to that, there are some basic recommendations (Grote, 1995; Labich, 1996; Miller, 1999, 2008, Lerbinger, 1997; Mitroff, 2001; Weitzel, 2004; Yandrick, 1996) that can facilitate the process.

Some authorities believe that the best person to terminate an employee is the manager or supervisor who has had the best overall relationship with the worker. Others recommend that the actual firing be done by a more objective and interpersonally removed higher-up, while the trusted supervisor remains a source of support to ease the transition. However it's done, a termination should always include a systematic process of documentation. The key to effective termination, in both the psychological and legal senses, is to make it as clear as possible to the employee that this action is for a specific reason, rather than for general attitude problems or personal beefs. This should be clearly reviewed and documented in writing.

In an uncomplicated, or "cool" termination, your company's own policies may dictate a variety of actions, including the opportunity for the employee to complete certain work projects, receive severance pay, or get insurance benefit protection for a specified time period. In an adversarial, or "hot" termination, the disturbed or disgruntled employee may have to be asked to leave immediately. He or she may have to be escorted off the premises by company security or police. Managers should not give the terminated worker time to stew, either by delaying the inevitable or allowing him or her to hang around and poison the workplace atmosphere with negative talk or dangerous behavior.

Termination should be done at the beginning or end of the shift. Most companies have a policy of not allowing terminated employees access to the premises without escort. Companies should have a strict ID policy in place and be prepared to enforce it. Even in this post-September 11 world, it is surprising how lax some organizations are with regard to

security, especially with people they've known in the past. Again, the employee should be treated to reasonable privacy and respect, but should understand in no uncertain terms – by the presence of security or police if necessary – that the termination action is final and will be backed up. He or she should also be informed of any counseling or other services offered by the company for the transition period. Providing continued medical and mental health benefits to help the fired employee over the hump is not just the humane thing to do, but may be an important measure in quelling revenge fantasies that could potentially lead to a violent confrontation.

In general, the least adversarial, embarrassing, and disruptive method for terminating the employee should be used. Law enforcement officers trained in verbal negotiation and conflict resolution strategies understand how much cooperation can be elicited from a seemingly hostile subject just by treating him or her in the proper manner: firm but fair, no abuse but no nonsense – the difference between *authoritative* and *authoritarian*, i.e. Sheriff Andy Taylor versus Deputy Barney Fife (Miller, 2006). If cops can do it, so can managers. It's distressing to observe how a clumsy, heavy-handed, gratuitously nasty, and unnecessarily humiliating approach can turn an otherwise malleable situation into a violent explosion – or ruinous lawsuit.

After a termination, the remaining employees will usually want to know what happened. On an individual basis, company representatives should make themselves available to anyone who would like to sit down and discuss in general terms why the terminated employee is no longer with the company. In particularly controversial or high-profile cases, management should issue a company-wide memo explaining the gist of what happened and why the actions were taken. It's not management's obligation to offer rationalizations or justifications as to why a problem employee was terminated, and the purpose of this informational briefing is certainly not to violate basic privacy or to gossip about the terminated employee, but to use the opportunity as an educative experience to inculcate company policies and procedures. Company spokespersons should address comments to the concerns voiced by the remaining staff about their own roles and responsibilities, and lay the groundwork for more effective communication in the future:

“You've all been oriented to our policy on workplace harassment and violence. When an employee consistently violates those policies

and has not been responsive to our efforts to correct it, we have no choice but to let him or her go.”

Managers will want to consult with their legal departments about how much information they can provide, but it is important that management control wild rumors and let the remaining personnel know that, if they have a problem with another employee or supervisor, they can bring it up without fear of recrimination from their bosses.

Conclusions: The Role of Administration, Management, and Leadership

Most employees know when they are being treated fairly and when they are not. As noted earlier, to fully address the problem of employee misconduct and poor performance, it must be treated as a system-wide problem that includes departmental administrative policies as well as individual elements of the human resource system described in this paper, namely, selection, training, supervision, coaching, counseling, discipline, and access to mental health services when needed. These elements should ideally be integrated into a structure that maximizes their impact on the individual employee and on the organization overall.

Consistent with the leadership literature from management psychology (Buckingham, 2005; Collins, 2001; Flin, 1996; Le Storti, 2003; Miller, 2006a, 2008; Sewell, 1992), integrity begins at the top. In this view, the most important factor for prevention of misconduct in an organization is a leader who is mature, seasoned, stable, utilizes cognitively flexible thinking, and has personal integrity and a strong personal ethic. Company leaders who set a strong, positive tone for their agencies and back it up with firm and fair action, should be able to expect an organization they can be proud of.

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