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win without fighting

Even at their harmonious best, many organizations are often a 'cacophony' of dissenting views and behaviors, which leads to managers having to deal with unmanageable employees. But, the good news is that even such an unruly lot can be made to toe the line with a few simple steps.

As a manager, you have likely encountered unmanageable employees. Egomaniacs. Slackers. Employees who go AWOL when you need them, miss deadlines, chase away clients, and fracture your team's morale. The list could probably go on forever, because there seems to be no end to the new and creative ways that employees find to become unmanageable.

Yet the very word unmanageable, which is used by so many managers, suggests that these behaviors cannot be managed.

My belief—supported by years of front-line coaching and consulting—is that most unmanageable employees (UEs) can change. Most of the employees who torment your days (and sometimes sneak into your dreams at night) have the temporary kind of unmanageability. You can salvage the situation. And here is how to do it.

five steps to manage an unmanageable employee

Let us work with the premise that most UEs can be made tractable. But how? Here is a methodology, called the

5Cs, which will guide you to the best possible solution. Following this method will guarantee that your thinking (and your actions) is clear, consistent, and well-organized, and improve your chances of success.

step 01: commit or quit

When you are dealing with a UE, you have an important decision to make before you do anything else. That decision is: will I retain this employee or not? You must consider the costs and benefits of taking on a major challenge (UE salvage) against the costs and benefits of starting from scratch by finding and hiring a new employee. This is a big decision, because UE salvage requires you to make a firm and serious commitment to her future. Commitment? To someone driving me nuts? Yes.

If you do not care about your UE and do not commit to her professional success, then she is going to know that and will resist any help that you offer. At every step of the 5Cs, you and the UE must tacitly re-commit to success.

How do you make the decision of whether to commit or let the person go? Take the time to quantify the problem, estimate the cost of creating a solution, and compare that cost to the cost of letting the UE go and finding a replacement. You must also make a subjective evaluation of their potential. This approach allows you to make a decision not based on emotions, which may be peaked when dealing with someone wreaking havoc on your team, or making your life difficult.

step 02: communicate

Once you have committed, your next step is something managers and employees alike prefer to avoid: a frank conversation with the person who has been tormenting you.



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Do not worry, though; you will not be winging it. Armed with the information that you collected during step 01, you will start by presenting your view of the problem, including information about its impact, to your UE. Through ongoing communication, you two can ultimately agree on a definition of the problem and on how you will work together to solve it.

Use these ten questions to prepare for the frank conversation; they will ease the dread.

- what problem is my UE presenting?
- do I have any sense of the root cause of the problem?
- what is the impact on my UE's performance?
- what is the impact on my team?
- what actions have I taken so far?
- how has my UE responded to those actions?
- when will I hold the conversation?
- what are the main points I must get across?
- what are the questions I might ask my UE?
- how will I know if the talk is a success?

Ultimately, good planning is what leads to success at this step. And take note: this process may take several conversations.

Now it is time to dig below the surface, and start deciding how that change will happen.

step 03: clarify goals and roles

Most people believe that they know what is expected of them at work. Problems arise when the expectations are unclear. Often, this lack of clarity revolves around the UE's goals (what she is expected to accomplish as an employee), and/or her role (how she is expected to function within the team; what responsibilities are hers, and not hers).

Every employee must be clear about the goals they are expected to achieve. They must be outcome-oriented, purposeful, and SMART (specific, measurable, agreed-upon, relevant, and time-based).

There are formal, and informal, roles in every organization. Formal roles are those that are seen on an organizational chart; informal roles are often those of influencers—those people that do not hold official positions, yet hold sway over an organization. Both are vitally important. Help your UE understand what her role is in the organization.

step 04: coach

At the heart of many UEs' behavior is a problem with their attitude. I define attitude as 'the inner focus and motivation that a person brings to the activities in her life'. While some UEs will self-correct, following a frank communication (or when you have clarified their roles and goals), most will need to examine and shift the inner attitudes that are giving rise to unmanageability.

Coaching can be quickly learned, and even more quickly applied to UEs. It is one of your most powerful and flexible tools. Simply put, coaching is helping people find their own solutions by asking questions. This helps the UE think through their own behavioral problems, find their own solutions to those problems, and develop the motivation to change in a positive way. You increase buy-in this way.

In my book, *A Manager's Guide to Coaching*, my co-author Brian Emerson and I discuss the following equation for success:

APTITUDE + ATTITUDE + AVAILABLE RESOURCE = LEVEL OF SUCCESS

The idea is that to succeed in any work-related task, an employee must apply a combination of relevant skills (aptitude), motivation (attitude), and time, money, equipment, help, and so on (available resources).

Yet, the centerpiece to effective coaching is the ability to ask good coaching questions. These questions are open-ended, advice-free, thought-provoking, and forward-focused. Most importantly, ask questions, do not tell the person what to do.

step 05: create accountability

Unfortunately, even if your coaching is effective, many people will begin to backslide almost immediately, if left to their own devices.

Old behaviors and habits have tremendous power, as anyone who has tried to stay on a diet plan will attest. The same is true of attitudes, which may be the hardest habits to break of all. That is why it is mandatory that you help your UE stay on track by creating a system to hold her accountable. Do not just pat her on the back; put in some serious time and effort to create a system that will help her deliver the changes she has promised to make and the commitments she has promised to meet.



Accountability is not just about your UE being accountable to you. It is also about your commitment to help her succeed by being vigilant in monitoring her progress. This is a two-way street.

accountability is a joint venture

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To that end, ask your UE questions such as, "How will I know that things are changing?" and "What is the best way for us to check in?" Ideally, your UE will also be asking similar questions, such as, "What is the best way to quickly run an idea past you?" and "Will you give me more time to reach a goal if I need it?"

there is no set roadmap to salvage an employee

As you begin the journey of UE salvage, remember that no roadmap, however detailed and accurate, can fully represent what you will encounter in real life. Use the 5Cs to plan a route which can guide your UE from unmanageability back to productivity. And get ready for the journey. ■