

Dear Claudia,

Can an employee cause problems by being too nice to be productive?

Dear Claudia:

There's a woman in my office who is truly a "good" person. Over the years, I've learned how to deal with bad people, but how do you deal with someone who is too nice?

She does a reasonably good job with her work, but she also spends an inordinate amount of time on charitable projects, food drives, organizing special celebrations, and collecting money to buy other employees gifts on special occasions.

In the past, I've always felt these activities made the office a better place to work. But lately I've become concerned that these things are taking up so much of her time that her work is beginning to suffer.

What's more, some of the other employees are beginning to grumble when they see her coming with a large envelope in hand.

I wasn't sure how to handle the situation until last week when she came

into my office and asked me to carry in three cases of candy she was pushing to support her nephew's high school band.

That did it. I told her she should be at her desk working instead of spending so much time collecting donations and raising money for this charity or that cause. She left my office in tears and afterwards I felt terrible. What should I do next?

"Which Way to Turn"

Dear "Which Way":

You're absolutely right that there's a ton of information out there on how to handle the "bad" employee but not much on how to deal with "good" ones who cause problems, too.

Obviously her charitable activities, while admirable, were getting in the way of her work. It's necessary to sit down and talk with her about how much time she spends on these extracurricular activities during her work hours.

Of course, timing is everything. Communication on potentially sensitive issues is never as productive when it's off the cuff, as yours was.

Take some time to formulate exactly what you want to say to her and what's the best way to present your message.

Bear in mind that this employee is a relationship-minded individual. She cares a great deal about feelings and will relate best to someone who takes feelings into consideration.

I believe it's possible for you to still be encouraging about her activities while at the same time helping her regain her focus on the task-related is-

ues that need to be addressed during office hours. Be sensitive, yet definitely have a goal in mind (what you hope to accomplish in your little talk with her) so that you'll be able to stick to the issue when you take the time to address the issue in a more relaxed, prepared manner.

Dear Claudia:

Several items: One female employee of ours can't remember to follow up on

Career Communications

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orders and requisitions to ensure that all materials and equipment will be on hand when the next phase of a project is scheduled to begin.

Another employee is making personal long-distance telephone calls on the company WATS line, something that is expressly prohibited in the company employee manual. Another employee regularly appears dazed when he reappears from his lunch break, and his productivity goes down in the afternoon.

One final employee has been absent five times in the last two months. He says the problem is allergies, but they always seem to pop up on Fridays or Mondays.

What should I do?

"Multiple Problems"

Dear "Problems":

From time to time, people in your

department will do something that requires disciplinary action. Disciplining can be a very difficult and delicate task.

Of course you want the punishment to fit the crime, but you also have to consider the rights of the employee and whether the long-term interests of the company are being served.

You also want the discipline to work, or else there's no point in bother-

ing. Most of all, you want the behavior to disappear and never come back.

When feedback, coaching, or counseling is inappropriate or ineffective, you must begin a formal disciplinary program.

The progressive approach to employee discipline specifies action steps that grow more and more severe if the problem behavior continues.

With the issues you've outlined, you need to begin taking some of these measures. And only you as the supervisor can do it.

The first step is a formal oral reprimand. When you give this, explain exactly what the employee has done, make it clear that this is unacceptable, and describe what type of behavior is expected.

Then explain to the employee what will happen if he or she does not meet your expectations in the future.

If an oral reprimand doesn't work, you may need to move to a written reprimand.

If that doesn't work, try probation. If that fails, the only recourse is termination.

You need to take charge of these situations. Address them before they grow into something that cannot be managed.

Questions? Claudia answers work-related questions from readers in every issue of the Examiner.

Questions for Claudia can be addressed to: 5007 Pacific Highway East, Suite 22, Tacoma WA 98424.

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