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Workplace Woes: Identifying the Pessimist

[By Monisha Bhat]

Few things are as energy-sapping in the workplace as a spiteful pessimist. There you are, happily typing at your computer, radiating confidence and getting work done at super speed. Suddenly, you spy a colleague peering at you with a sneer and saying, “Working hard, eh? Carry on, slave!”

It’s a fresh, breezy morning, and you are sprinting up to the office. But then your heart sinks almost immediately: the office pessimist is standing there, waving to you. Already the morning has lost some of its cheer.

Pessimists love to talk trash about all company developments. They will denigrate the new copier being installed in the office and talk about how bringing in new bells and whistles is futile. A senior official’s motivational pep talk will be treated with great unkindness by this species. They will proceed to make a huge mockery of the event over the next few months—or even years—regardless of how foolish it makes them appear.

Step Off!

Here is a question for the seasoned pessimist: Why don’t you take your bag of troubles and just step off? Feel free to confront pessimists about their attitudes because the truth is you don’t have to stand around taking all their negativity.

Pessimists constantly find things to complain about, from the workload to the water cooler to the computer system. It wouldn’t be so bad if they decided to keep their issues to themselves. But the pessimist

philosophy is “Sharing spite makes the world a better place!”

Spotting the Spite

You can identify a pessimist from far off. They are the ones with permanent smirks on their faces. They laugh at you because you work for “this place.” Well, hello, someone ought to remind them that *they* work for “this place,” too!

Pessimists are all alike in one respect: they always try to make the other person see their side of the story. And they are very passionate about it, too!

I once knew a pessimist who would lounge about in her chair half the time yet spring up with amazing speed when she had the opportunity to share “bleak” news. It was difficult to pass by her cubicle without getting snagged. But even if you escaped in the morning, she would catch you at lunchtime. Yes, pessimists have a wonderful sense of timing when it comes to voicing complaints.

The Pessimist and the Newcomer

The power of the pessimist intensifies when a newcomer arrives at the office. Fresh and impressionable, the newcomer finds a welcoming smile on the pessimist’s face

and wonders why the others are not so enthusiastic about this kind person.

Then the pessimist tells the newcomer about how the company is going through “difficult times” and is not likely to survive another financial year. If the new hire has doubts, she should pay attention to the fact that the water cooler is not cooling enough or that the defective copier has not yet been replaced.

If the pessimist is determined, the newcomer will never get a chance to find her feet; she will move on to a new job as soon as possible.

The Point Is...

It is not acceptable to speak negatively about your employer. There is a very simple logic to this: If you speak ill of A today, who is to say you won’t speak the same way of B tomorrow?

People who talk trash about the places where they work come across as hugely negative. This is one of the “red flag” areas during the interview process, too. No matter how upset you are at your job or with your boss, being spiteful is not the solution.

Dealing with spiteful coworkers is an exercise in patience. Constantly hearing someone speak so negatively can affect



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the mind of even the most clearheaded individual. The good news is that all pessimists, at some point or another, do see the futility of such behavior. They grow as individuals and mature into efficient workers. Until they do, watch out. And don't let them get to you!

ON THE NET

How to Deal with a Negative Coworker:
Negativity Matters
[humanresources.about.com/od/
conflictresolution/a/negative_worker.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/conflictresolution/a/negative_worker.htm)

Dealing with the Negative Employee
[www.employer-employee.com/
october2002tips.html](http://www.employer-employee.com/october2002tips.html)

Tips for Minimizing Workplace Negativity
[humanresources.about.com/od/
workrelationships/a/negativity.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/workrelationships/a/negativity.htm)

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