

How to get rid of the grumps in your life

17 October, 2022

Dianna Booher* discusses her experience of working with someone who could never be made happy.

Negative people sap your energy and attention. They break your focus.

I used to have an employee—I'll call her Carmen—who wouldn't speak before 9:00 am.

When she walked into the office in the morning, her greeting sounded a little gruff—if she were in a reasonable mood.

If in a bad mood, she merely sneered until people stepped aside.

If we closed the office for a holiday, it was the "wrong" holiday, according to her—one that she would have rather worked so she could have taken off a different holiday.

Once our office changed to a pick-your-own-holidays policy, Carmen's gripe changed to "there's not enough staff to cover operations" on the days she scheduled herself to be out.

If we decided to order in Chinese for somebody's birthday, Carmen wanted barbecue.

I'd congratulate her and a coworker for doing a great job on a project, and Carmen would write me a note telling me the coworker hadn't helped all that much.

She just wanted to "set the record straight."

I put up with this disposition and attitude for about three years because Carmen was an extremely productive and talented employee.

But one day, she came in and presented a ... "challenge" for me.

Could she start working part-time?



"I really want to work only about 25-30 hours a week—to be at home when my kids leave for school and when they get home.

"I don't need the insurance because I can get on my husband's policy.

"Could we just pro-rate everything else—the retirement, the vacation days, the holidays, and so forth?"

I agreed.

She could work the number of hours she wanted, come in and leave when she wanted, take the vacations or holidays she wanted.

She loved me—for about three weeks.

Then she caught me at the copier one morning.

"My husband doesn't want me on his insurance policy.

"So I need to get back on yours."

"I'm sorry we can't make an exception for you," I told her.

"But you probably recall that we don't provide insurance for part-time employees.

"And that wasn't part of your original request three weeks ago."

"Then I'll be looking for another job immediately." Carmen turned on her heel and stalked away.

The next day, she had a different note on my desk.

"I want to keep working full-time.

"Please ignore what I said yesterday.

"In no way did I offer my resignation."

So I waited.

Two days later she had another note in my in-box.

"I've changed my mind.

"I want to work 28 hours a week. Nine to 2:30.

"I'll pay my own insurance.... And if you'll okay this arrangement, I'll agree to work here for one more year."

I called her into my office again.

"Carmen, you can work whatever and whenever you want to for now, but I encourage you to go ahead and begin your job search.

"I wouldn't think of holding you here for another year."

Negative people need to find the proper niche

That has been one of the best employee decisions I've made through the years.

After her departure, even her closest colleague in the department commented on how morale for the entire organization had improved.

You can teach someone skills, but you can't teach them attitude and disposition.

And negative people have a way of drenching your whole office or home in a downpour.

Negative people drain your energy and your time, and break your concentration on the important things.

Size up your own situation to rev up morale

Rev up your own morale and that of colleagues who must interact with the negative person.

Here's a starter list of prompt questions to answer for yourself:

- **Who are the negative people at work?**

Distinguish between those who disagree with a position or opinion (often a good thing in decision making) but hold common goals and commitments from those people who are generally disagreeable about everything.

- **Who are the negative people in your personal life**—family members, neighbours, club or hobby acquaintances?
- **How many hours of sleep have you sacrificed** over unpleasant situations involving this disagreeable person?
- **How often do you feel physically sick** (stomach pains, migraines, the sweats, anxiety attacks) when contemplating an interaction with this person?
- **How can you minimize contact with this person?**

Can you change the contact person for the activity? Can you alter the process or procedure involving this person?

Can you tap a substitute for your “touch point”? Can you change the timeline or scheduling to reduce contact?

In most situations, you do have options in dealing with the Carmens or Carls in your life.

Select an option and take action to save your sanity and physical health!

**Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 49 books. She can be contacted at BooherResearch.com.*

This article first appeared at forbes.com.

