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Personnel Management

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO  
Problem Employees

*R. W. Schermerhorn, Extension Professor and Head  
Department of Agricultural Economics and Applied Statistics*

The problem employee is one who, for some reason, doesn't contribute to your organization as you intended. You expect him to do one thing, but he does another. Faulty communications may be part of the problem, but a firm may have excellent communications and still have several employees who do not perform as expected.

To deal effectively with a problem employee, you have to know **why** he's a problem. Possible reasons are:

1. Lack of skill in the job.
2. Misplacement.
3. Lack of job structure.
4. Incompatibility between employee and employer.
5. Inadequate supervision.
6. Emotional immaturity.
7. Physiological deterioration or poor health.

Still other reasons why an employee is a problem are poor personal adjustment, feelings of insecurity about the job or off-the-job difficulties. Let's examine some of these in more detail.

Lack of Skill

Sometimes a person is a problem employee because he lacks skill or competence in the job. His skill may have been sufficient when you hired him, but it didn't increase as the job grew.

Not being able to perform the job as well as he'd like — or as well as he thinks you expect him to — can do several things to an employee. It might, for example, make him indifferent to customers.

Misplacement

Often an employee becomes a problem because he's in the wrong job. Perhaps he's selling and failing

miserably because he lacks self-reliance (the capacity to accept rejection without anxiety).

This person may begin to feel that customers don't like him. And, in some cases, this feeling causes him to act in a hostile way toward them.

Lack of Job Structure

Without job structure (detailed and clear instructions about what they are to do), most employees become confused. When an employee wonders in his own mind why he doesn't know his job, he might decide that, "It's my fault. I didn't pay enough attention when he was explaining it." More likely, a confused employee will blame his employer — "That so-and-so never says what he wants, and then jumps on me when I do it wrong." Either conclusion damages personal morale **and** tends to lower morale throughout the firm.

Incompatibility

Some people are problems because of incompatibility with their employers. "I just can't get along with him," a salesman says about the store manager. And the manager says, "No matter how hard I try to understand him, he rubs me the wrong way."

What causes such friction between two persons — both of whom are conscientiously trying to cooperate? Some people call it "personality clash." Actually, the situation is more complex than this label implies. As a manager, though, you need to be aware of such incompatibility and realize that there isn't much you can do to change it.

Inadequate Supervision

Many employees become problems because of inadequate supervision. In some cases, they don't

know what to do, and the boss doesn't seem to care when or how they do it. People begin to deteriorate when they aren't kept busy at constructive tasks. They lose interest, become indifferent or sometimes resentful.

Closely related to this situation is inconsistent or capricious supervision. One day the boss is strict. The next day he's lax. Employees don't know what to expect. "Some days he treats me awful," one employee says, "but on other days he lets us get by with murder."

### Emotional Immaturity

Other employees are problems because they are not emotionally mature. They never completely grew up, and sometimes they think and act like children.

To a certain extent, everyone suffers with this condition. The difference between an emotionally immature person and one who is called normal is that the normal person has fewer emotional disturbances, and he is often able to control them.

### Physiological Deterioration Or Poor Health

The human body changes constantly. Deterioration sets in early with some persons, later with others, but eventually with everyone. Sometimes it's sudden as when an apparently healthy person suf-

heart attack. Or it may be gradual as when an employee loses his hearing over several years.

Often, the most difficult problem created by such poor health conditions are the anxiety and psychological damages that often go with changing physical conditions.

For example, nature may repair an employee's damaged heart so that he's almost as good as new, but he may never overcome his anxiety. His constant fear of another attack may turn him into a problem employee.

### Summary

Most firms have some problem employees. To deal effectively with these employees, you have to know why they are problems. Some of the reasons behind problem employees have solutions. For example, we can help employees develop adequate skills, or we can shift the employee to another job, or we can provide detailed and clear instructions or we can provide adequate supervision.

Other reasons behind problem employees may not have solutions. However, if we know the reasons, we can take them into consideration when dealing with the employee. And, if we deal with our employees effectively, we will have carried out the most important function of good management. Remember, management is "getting things done through people."

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