

Examples of Informal Conversations With 4 Different Problematic Employees

4 Situations Being Covered:

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| 1. An Underperformer | A person who is not producing the same level of work as the rest of the team. |
| 2. Poor Behaviour | A good team work who starts to refuse to attend team meetings and communication with team members |
| 3. A Potential Bully | A new junior manager who appears to be using bullying tactics with his team members |
| 4. An Overly Negative Person | A good team members who's communication style is very negative, which in turn impacts the motivation of other team members |

An Underperformer

Cara has been underperforming compared to her peers for a little while. You have done your homework and have a number of examples that you can share to demonstrate the gap between Cara and her colleagues.

You might raise the issues with Cara as follows...

Manager “I have taken a look at each team member’s performance from a quality and volume of output point of view. I would like to discuss these with you.

Before I share, where do you think you sit on both measures – near the top, somewhere in the middle or towards the bottom?”

Wait for Cara’s reply.

Manager “What reference points or assumptions are you making when you say that you are XXX relative to the average of the team?”

Wait for Cara’s reply. [The aim is to get Cara thinking and reflecting and hopefully showing sensible self-awareness or self-appraisal]

Manager “Let go through the results. I have shown each individual in the team as a percentage above or below the average of the team as whole. I have also shown quality and quantity relative to each person’s individual targets.

As you can see, you are bottom on both sets of metrics. I have also looked through the complexity and the other factors of your claims compared to other team members to check how this might impact.

An Underperformer (Continued)

I would suggest that your claims are not substantially different and are probably easier on average than some others that are scoring higher than yourself.

Do you have any comments to share in response?”

... the conversation continues

In the conversation, I would also state that you are willing to provide direct support and training to help for a period of time AND you expect to see improvement in exchange for the help and support AND that improved metrics continue after this training and support has finished.

Poor Behaviour

Daniel is a quieter member of the team, who prefers to work on his own and takes advantage of the hybrid working policy to work from home two days a week.

Recently, Daniel has started refusing to join project team meetings sharing updates saying he is too busy and is not communicating with the rest of the project team. You might start the conversation like this ...

Manager “... thanks for giving me such a good update on the project work you are involved in. It is really good to hear that you are enjoying the problem solving involved in planning out the next 3 steps.

I was chatting with Sarah the project manager today and I have spoken to some of the project team members. They have said you are refusing to join the team catchup meetings and have not been communicating very well in the last few weeks.

Please can you tell me what has caused you to change your behaviour?”

Daniel “I have been really busy with this project and the normal day to day ... I have just not had time to go to the meetings.”

Manager “Can you tell me how the rest of the team, or Sarah, are going to know what you have completed, what you are currently working on and what issues you might be facing?”

Daniel “errr ... I have been doing my work and not holding the team back.”

Manager “That is good to hear. You haven’t answered my question.”

Poor Behaviour (Continued)

Daniel “They don’t really know exactly. I would hope they would trust me to do what I need to without checking on me.”

Manager “Daniel, if this is about trust, how are you showing trust to the other team members? Secondly, how is Sarah or other team members suppose to co-ordinate workstreams and activities if they don’t know where you are with your work?”

Long pause (manager sits attentively waiting for an answer)

Daniel “eeerrrr ... you are right. I have been struggling to work with Gemma and Sarah. I find them very hard to get through to. I am really frustrated and not having as much to do with them seemed like a good option.”

Manager “Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me what the issues really are. I really appreciate it. What options have you tried to rectify the situation?”

... [the conversation continues]

A Potential Bully

A team member alerted you to an example of bullying they witnessed. You have asked other team members what they have observed and they have confirmed bullying is happening.

The bullying has been started by a new junior manager in your team.

After collecting examples of the bullying behaviour, the manager starts the conversation ...

Manager “... I have another more serious matter to bring up with you. I have been given several examples by different people about specific actions you have been taking towards other team members.

Before I cover these examples with you, do you have any idea what I might be concerned about?”

Alex “I am not really sure what you are referring to.”

Manager “Okay, I have examples where you appear to be putting down team members, undermining them and one case being told of a team member throwing up in the loos prior to going into their appraisal meeting with you.

None of these examples paints you in a good light. Do you have any response?”

Alex “I am not sure where these examples you have come from, but I assure you that they are untrue. I know a couple of team members don't like me much and have been trying to cause trouble.”

A Potential Bully (Continued)

Manager “Okay. The fact that you are stating - ‘some of your team members don’t like you much and have been trying to cause trouble’ raises some concerns in my mind about how you are managing your team. I appreciate that you are relatively new to managing and there is a lot to learn and there is a lot of pressure to perform.

On the flip side, I have to take the allegations made against you very seriously. I know that poor management styles and inappropriate behaviour have a huge impact on individuals, their enjoyment of being at work and very importantly negatively impacts team performance and our company’s reputation for being a good place to work. Both are very serious issues for the company.

As a result, I have to start a formal investigation, so that we are able to understand what exactly has happened and why this has come about. I am very keen to understand your version of events as well. I will be working alongside Jane from HR and once we have concluded a proper investigation we will then decide an appropriate course of action. I must warn you that, if these allegations are proven, you will be invited into a disciplinary process, which may result in you losing your job.

Do you have anything to add at this point before I take you through the examples provided to be so far?”

Alex “No, I am keen to see these examples.”

.... [the conversation continues]

3b

A Potential Bully (Continued)

The approach by the manager is very direct and talks as much about the facts available as possible. Investing both sides of the situation is very important for fairness. This conversation is about demonstrating that you the manager are aware of the situation, that you re-state expectations and what the next steps will be as well as possible consequences.

An Overly Negative Person

Lisa performs well in her job, is a team good team player and is well liked by most of the team. Lisa always finds the problems in everything and focuses on what could go wrong. While Lisa spots problem quickly and finds problems others have not considered, she tends to voice these concerns very publicly.

The unbalanced focus on problems is demotivating in team meetings and for the team overall and other team members are starting to complain about the negativity...

You might raise the subject like this...

Manager “... Lisa, would you mind if we talk about how you express your ideas and concerns publicly – for instance when in team meetings?”

Lisa “okay”

Manager “You are very good at spotting problems with courses of action and projects. You have a very good skill which is beneficial for helping the team avoiding issues and getting work consistently completed quicker with less holdups.

I am concerned about how you express your fears and worries about the problems you spot. I watch the reaction of other team members. Some of the more common reactions are:

1. Rolling of eyes from some team members – like here we go again, or
2. their shoulders sag, feeling deflated and even a bit battered from what they perceive is criticism or
3. the room loses some of its energy and momentum. There is less enthusiasm to solve the problem

A Overly Negative Person (Continued)

Manager For the avoidance of doubt, I value your focus on the problems and what could go wrong. I don't want you do stop doing this. I am concerned about how you express your views and ideas.

I am asking you to consider how you might add a bit more balance into how you express your views. For instance, you could talk about the problems you see after talking about what your think is good and will work.

What do you think about how you communicate your views in group setting?"

Lisa "I am really sorry. I didn't know that I was having such a negative impact on the team."

Manager "Would you humour me and talk about 2 positive impacts and then cover 2 negative impacts you think your approach is having on the team"

Lisa "Okay, give me a minute to think about this."

... [the conversation continues]

The manager focuses Lisa on the positives as well as the negatives by asking specifically phrased questions about both. The manager could use a coaching approach with Lisa (by asking questions) to get her to come up with a couple of approaches for her to commit to trying.

I would expect these types of conversations to happen over several one-on-one meetings. The manager given feedback on what is going well and what still needs work and helping the team member to work out different solutions to using their negativity in more constructive ways.