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NEXT STEP

Cubicle dramarama

Difficult employees and how to handle them

Whether your company is an early-stage start-up or a huge corporation, you've surely run into an employee who drives you batty. Here's a look at 10 of the most irritating workplace characters--along with some advice on how to get them back on track.

The undecider

He takes days to make a decision and then, after it's made, revisits it. Then revisits it again. Then, when things fall apart and he is held responsible for his indecision, he becomes indignant or evasive. "It's not MY fault!"

How to cope: Establish a deadline where the decision must be final, and a default decision that will hold true if no decision is made. When the deadline comes, that's it. Refuse to consider any other alternatives.



The drama queen

He automatically turns absolutely everything into a hissy fit, replete with pique, umbrage, and a host of other French emotions. He seems to draw energy from the drama, while draining energy from everyone else.

How to cope: Set up boundaries for the behavior that you won't tolerate. Eject him from any meeting where his behavior becomes obstructive.



The droner

He's always ready to give you a presentation--and it's usually one you've heard before. He's got a list of bullet points and is going to read each and every one to you! **How to cope:** Have a written agenda for every meeting, with a limited amount of time for presentations. Better yet, make a "no PowerPoint" rule for your meetings. Then stick to it.



The ultra-competitor

No matter how a situation plays out, no matter who gets hurt in the process, the ultra-competitor can't let it go until he's convinced that he's won--and, more importantly, that someone else has lost.

How to cope: Get him focused on having the entire team win rather than just him. Hint: Pay him a bonus based on team achievement--never on individual accomplishment.

The iconoclast

He thrives on the negative attention that comes from dissing authority figures and social protocols. He misses deadlines just to prove he doesn't have to follow the rules, and takes up causes without really understanding the implications of his actions.

How to cope: It's all about aiming him at the right enemy. Oddly, these types often do well as "customer advocates" who can take on the bureaucracy in order to see that customers get what they need.



The social (network) butterfly

He is convinced that it's productive for him to remain online all day "building relationships" with all your customers. In fact, he's just adding to the day-to-day blather that's such an integral part of the social network. **How to cope:** Assign him measurable goals--like a certain number of qualified sales leads that he has to create every week.

The volcano

He explodes whenever things don't go the way he thinks they should. He screams at meetings, yells into the telephone, and gets in your face. While he might apologize later, the whole team ends up perpetually walking on eggshells.

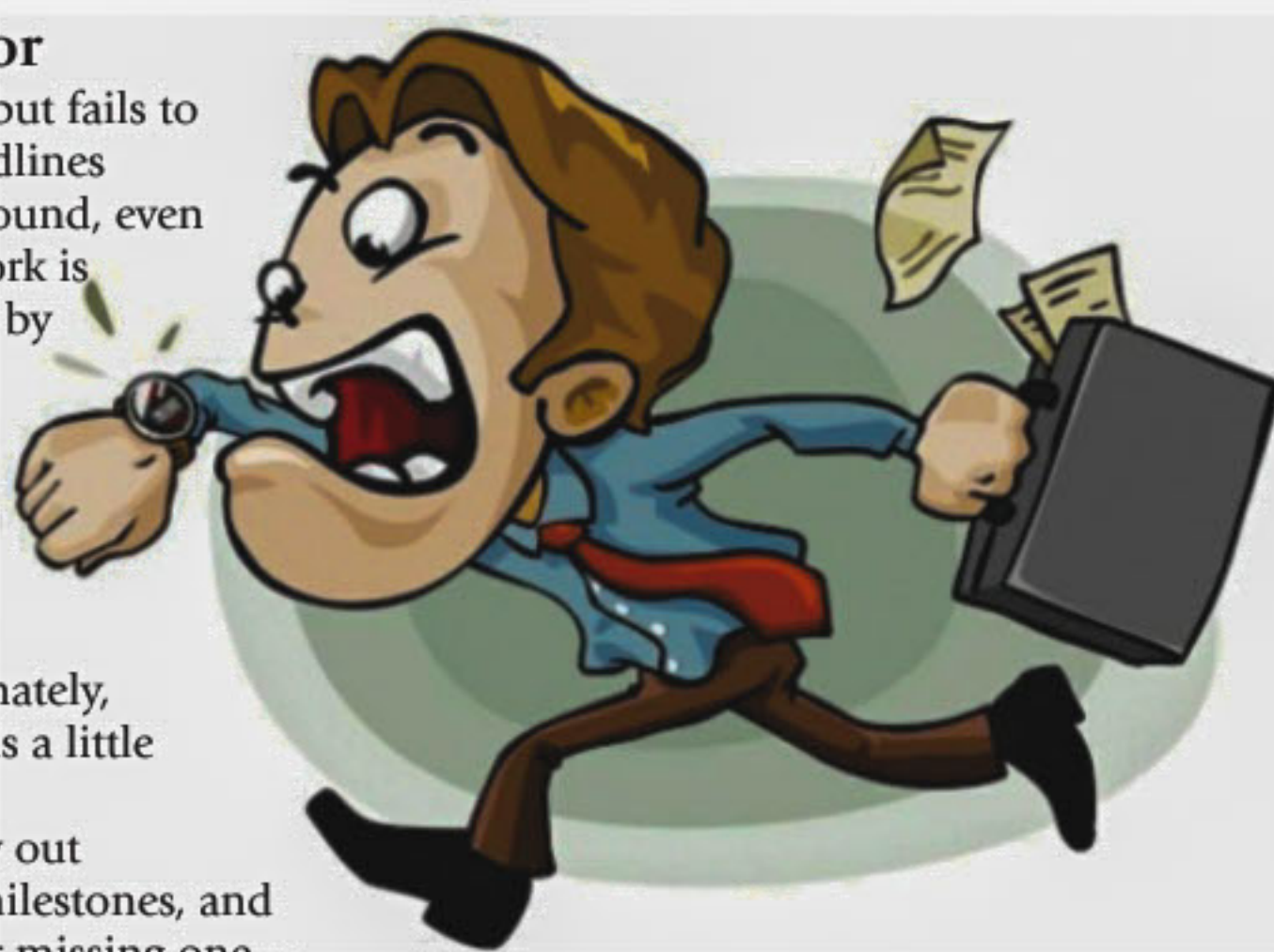
How to cope: Raise your own intensity (or you won't be heard), and then refuse to put up with unprofessional behavior. If necessary, leave the room until he's cooled down.



The procrastinator

He says yes to projects but fails to follow through. As deadlines approach, he can't be found, even via email. When the work is finally turned in (often by others who have covered for him), he'll go on a mini vacation to "recuperate from the stress."

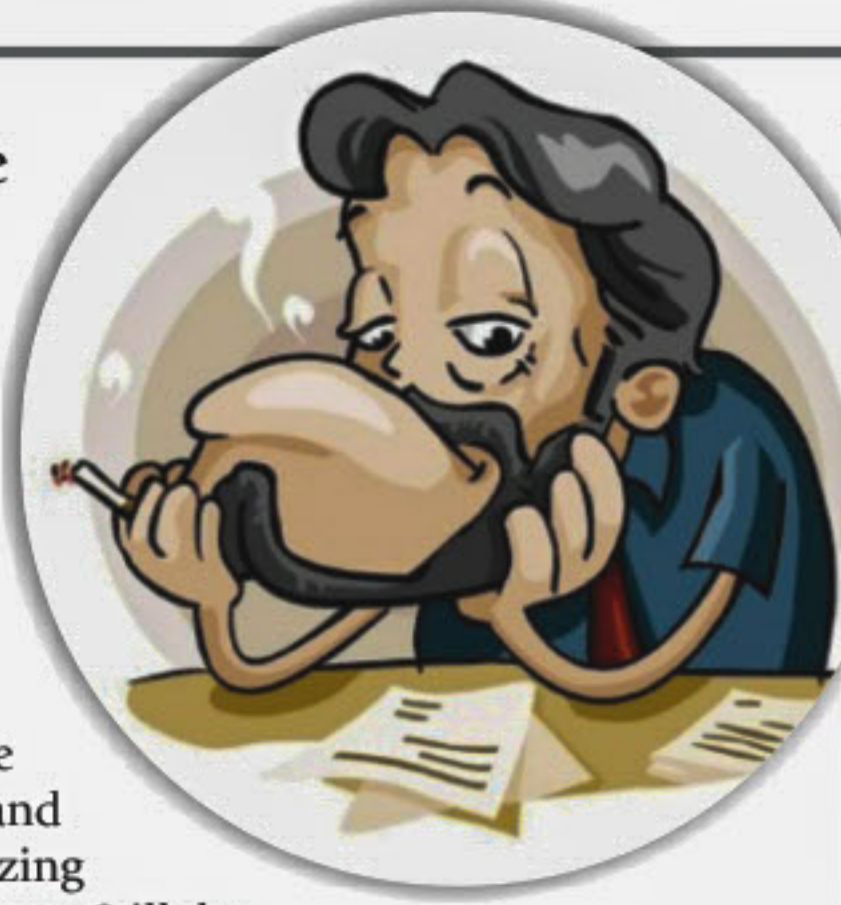
How to cope: Unfortunately, the only solution here is a little good old-fashioned micromanagement. Lay out frequent (even daily) milestones, and create consequences for missing one--or for failing to report that he missed it.



The creative genius

He's a legend in his own mind ... and makes certain that you know about it. He's always talking about the amazing stuff he did in the past and his equally amazing plans for the future. Still, he seldom seems to actually do anything today.

How to cope: Give some lip service to his greatness, then bring him down to earth by breaking a project into chunks and getting him to "consult" on each chunk.



The panic button

Some people really shine in a crisis. Others ... not so much. This guy remains calm for day and weeks, but then when a problem has reached its inevitable conclusion, he runs around like a decapitated chicken.

How to cope: Create an early warning system so that there are fewer surprises. And replace the regular coffee with the decaf on the day the bad news hits.



Stumped | Silly interview questions and what they really mean

What is your greatest flaw?

Why it's silly: Who in their right mind would give an honest answer to this question? Reveal your flaws to the person who's got your future in the palm of their hands? No thank you. In response to questions like this, we tend to conjure up answers that don't give a completely negative impression, such as "My time management could do with a bit more work. I put in extra hours, even at home."

What it really means: The purpose of this question is to gauge out the truth from the half-truth. "I work too hard" is not an obstacle or a flaw that you can work on. You can't just work less hard. A legitimate answer would be to say you're not great at teamwork. This is a clear area for improvement and from there onwards, you can talk about what you've been doing to overcome this weakness to become a better team player.

What do you want to be doing in five years?

Why it's silly: It might not hit you at first, but this question can't possibly have a definite answer. No one can plan that far ahead into the future. Opportunities sprout up, choices change. Life happens. But most candidates would steer clear of an answer that could suggest possible disloyalty to the company in the future anyway. That's why this question is a great way for the interviewer to pick your brain.

What it really means: The first thing you should know is that no company can expect you to swear a lifelong allegiance to it, especially not during your interview. Instead, talk about your career development plan, personal goals, broader interests, and how these can develop with the company. Definitely discuss your areas of strength as well as areas where you want to grow in the most.

Why did you pick this company?

Why it's silly: Sure this question is a little inconsequential. Why on earth would you be sitting in this chair right now if you weren't interested in this company? As long as you fit the JD, what does it matter why you picked this company?

What it really means: The interviewer simply wants you to identify your motives for applying. Are you just looking for a paycheck? Or are you miserable at your current job? These probably aren't answers the interviewer wants to hear. They want to know what excites you about the company and the opportunity. You need to draw a connection between your interests and your abilities and the position you're applying for.

What do you do in your spare time?

Why it's silly: A bit personal and a bit redundant is your first thought. What does playing football have to do with accounting? Or jogging with being an architect? This question crosses the line between work and pleasure, and it'll confuse the interviewee who cannot elaborate on how their hobbies add value to their lives.

What it really means: First of all, the interviewer has no intention of poking his nose into your private life. The interviewer is simply trying to make to find out more about you. Your hobbies can say a lot about how you work. Having more a wide variety of interests might mean you'd be suited for a creative position. If you're running a personal initiative on the side, it gives the interviewer a good picture of how you prioritize your time, and where your job fits in. Being involved in a sport or other physical activity can suggest you're in good health, and you're active and focused. It's also important to not just state your hobbies, but also discuss how it enriches your life or refreshes your mind.

What do your coworkers think of you?

Why it's silly: We can never know exactly what another person thinks of us, especially if you have a professional relationship with that person. If they've already let their feelings be known, and ruthlessly so, you're probably going to talk around the truth to make yourself look better. The interviewer will never know, so what's the harm in a little white lie?

What it really means: The best thing to do is cut down on the embellishing. It's an indirect way of asking how you view yourself and value your abilities. Are you helpful or withdrawn? It is also a modesty test, dividing those who love to go on about themselves and those who are more embarrassed to talk about themselves. Whatever you decide to say, try to find a good balance between the good's and the bad's.