

# How To Combat The Toxic High-Performer Employee?



**When your best employee has the worst attitude, what do you do?**

The top-performers in their fields such as LeBron James to Oprah Winfrey to Bill Gates, seem to have it all. Through a combination of talent, drive, and hard work, they lead their organisations to the next level.

In today's business landscape, organisations are defined as a collection of people. So, what happens when one of your top-performing staffers has a problematic disposition?

According to Dylan Minor from the Kellogg School of Management, “There is a difference between toxic and a rude employee. I call them toxic because not only do they cause harm but they also spread their behaviour to others. There is a pattern of de-energizing, frustrating or putting down teammates.”

### **Example**

*Ellen Smith was repeatedly laughed at and called the “B” word by one of her co-worker who claimed that he was the “ants pants salesperson for the business”. When she brought it up to the attention of her two managers, they did nothing. They didn't even acknowledge the email that she sent them. Nothing was said to her co-worker, who was sitting around gossiping and continuing with his sexual harassment. Two months later, she was fired for not being a team player. She was eight months away from having served 30 years with the company.*

So-called “toxic employees”, are one of the most common corporate culture downfalls. Good culture isn't founded on ping-pong tables or free beers. It's founded on mutual respect and values. Toxic employees undermine corporate culture initiatives and degrade the best kinds of HR programs.

But what happens if they are the top-performer toxic employee? Do you just ignore it? Do you try and sweep it under the carpet? Or do you terminate this brilliant-toxic employee?

On one hand, they are wickedly smart subject matter experts or functional specialists, but on the other hand, their brilliance comes with a measure of toxicity that is detrimental to the workplace culture and surrounding colleagues.

**So, who are they?** There is an infinite number of variations of what a toxic employee looks like, but in general, it's someone who is negative, blames others for their mistakes, and struggles to hold themselves accountable.

Some employees take it to the next level - “**narcissistic personality**”. Such people have a grandiose sense of importance, are preoccupied with fantasies and unlimited success, brilliance and that they are special, unique and can only be understood by other “special high-status people”.

## **What is the potential impact to your business?**

The impacts of a person that exhibiting negative workplace issues can be devastating. Impacts on the business resulting from their negative behaviour by employees can lead to low business morale; low level of trust; difficult doing business; conflict with colleagues; all the way to insider sabotage such as hacking; business and network disruptions; organisation leaking sensitive details or posting it online; deletion of high-value data.

## **What can you do about it?**

**One set of rules!** - Brilliant or not, you cannot dismiss the concerns and complaints from employees about toxic or disruptive behaviours from another employee. By rationalising one employee's behaviour, you are creating a culture of accountability with two sets of rules, which undermines your role as a manager.

**One set of values!** - While it may be uncomfortable to open a difficult discussion on inappropriate or destructive behaviour with your resident genius employee, you must provide clear, constructive behavioural feedback in a timely manner. Anything less will be perceived as implicit approval of these behaviours by all parties.

**Don't excuse it!** - It's often that we make excuses for “top-performers” who have a temperament that negatively impacts those around. Understand what is driving their behaviour, but if it doesn't improve, remove the employee.

**Consider the source!** - Every human is being driven by two forces. Pain and pleasure. Identify the reason why this person is behaving this way. Is the person seeking attention and importance (pleasure) or is the person hiding a

personal problem (pain)? These insights will provide you with an understanding of ways that you can deal with this person. Either way, work out how the behaviour must change, but if it doesn't improve, remove the employee.

**Offer support!** - Have a performance related conversation. There must be a clear understanding and communication between the problem, behaviour and expectation. It's not enough to tell them to fix the issue. They might need your support or the assistance of an employee program. Let them know that you are behind them.

**Document Everything!** - If you conclude that you need to fire the person, you must first document their offences and any response you've offered so far. You want to establish a pattern of behaviour, the steps you took to address it, the information, warnings or resources provided to the employee, and the failure of the employee to change. Include any supporting material - formal complaints, relevant information from performance evaluations, such as 360-degree or peer reviews. The idea is to protect yourself and the company and to show your employee exactly why they are being let go.

**Separate The Person!** - If for some reason, you are unable to get rid of the "bad apple", isolate the person from the rest of the group. Those with toxic behaviours, like to feed on others and their reactions. When such feedback is less coming, their behaviour starts to subside.

## How can we help you?

If you fear that you may have such a difficult person to deal with and that you are not sure how to proceed, then let us help you.

At CommsNet Group, we have qualified and certified Neuro-Linguistic Programmers that can directly or indirectly intervene. We can also help you set up an "**employee assistance program**". And we can certainly provide a customised training program for supervisors and managers, helping them positively handle and manage negative workplaces issues from employees.

## You can reach us

- <https://commsnet.com.au/contact-us>
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## Contact us

For more information, you can also send them an email at:

[info@commsnet.com.au](mailto:info@commsnet.com.au) Or give us a call at: +61 26282-5554.

## Additional resources

- Article – “**Seven Non-Technical Indicators That Might Suggest That You Have An Insider Threat**” -  
<https://commsnet.com.au/uploads/files/50/file/7-insider-threat-indicators.pdf>