

30 Business No No's (2)

It's a "No No" to let your workplace get infected!

*Don't hang out with angry people; don't keep company with hotheads. Bad temper is contagious—don't get infected.*¹ Solomon

Like a virus... bad temper is contagious!

Do you remember the bird flu? Do you remember the steps we were taking to get vaccine to people? We stopped flights in from China. People were being screened. There were pictures on the television of men and women wearing masks. Every effort was made to prevent the bird flu from getting to these United States. When it comes to anger we have the same responsibility as leaders.

I was recently eating lunch with my wife at her place of employment when her team erupted. There was a loud and abusive conversation between two members of the team. Her workplace divides each level into pods for creative planning and to encourage the exchange of ideas between team members. However, there is no training on how to handle conflict or on how to deal with abusive language and personality conflicts. They are only reminded that they are to behave professionally in their work environment. This amounts to a slap on the wrist for emotionally toxic individuals who are selfish and self focused rather than team centered in their approach.

Individuals who act in such a way discourage productivity and stifle creative workers from achieving. When an employer allows toxic workers to go unchecked he actually loses the better employees. One unknown author stated it this way. *Anger is one letter short of danger.*² If you are a leader, understand this, you cannot allow the workplace to become infected with an angry individual. It is a "No No" to let the workplace become infected with anger.

The fact is that words kill. Careless angry words between employees, staff, administrators, and even families kill. What do they kill? They will kill your business. They can kill your family. They can kill the productivity of the team. Toxic people let loose their anger when they are frustrated, or feel threatened. These emotionally disabled employees are an infection to the teams they are one because they kill the joy of going to work. Words spoken in anger kill productivity. Even Jesus acknowledged the disabling affects of anger. He said, "... Carelessly call a brother 'idiot!' and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell 'stupid!' at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill."³

A study from the University of Washington is in agreement. They titled their study "Bad Apples". They describe the workers as like a "Virus".

A study from the University of Washington Business School published in *Research in Organizational Behavior* in 2007 examined how negative behavior by one person in an organization can impact on teams and groups. Researchers describe these individuals as "bad apples" acting like a virus within teams, with the capacity to "upset or spoil the whole apple cart".⁴

Don't get infected!

I found this article on line from HR magazine from December 1996 issuing a warning to CEO's, leaders, and business men about the infection of anger in the workplace. *"This is a very real problem for American business," said Hendrie Weisinger, "Management can't just ignore this any longer." Employees aged 18 to 34 are more than four times as likely to report feeling angry than workers aged 50 and over, ...* "These are real issues to the employee," said Weisinger. *"They hurt productivity. They block the teamwork that managers say they want. And, tragically, they lead to the explosions of violence and aggressive behavior that are now all too frequent occurrences in the American workplace."*⁵

¹ MSG, **Proverbs 22:24-25**; Biblegateway.com/ March 4, 2009; 10:25 AM

² (<http://www.quote garden.com/anger.html/> March 3, 2009; 8:10 PM)

³ (MSG, **Matthew 5:22-23** " www.biblegateway.com/ March 3, 2009; 8:25 PM)

⁴ <http://www.hrmguide.com/commitment/negative-behavior.htm/> March 4, 2009; 10:35

⁵ (Workplace anger, a growing problem [HR Magazine](http://www.hr-magazine.com/) , [Dec, 1996](http://www.hr-magazine.com/) by [Elaine McShulskis](http://www.hr-magazine.com/):http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3495/is_n12_v41/ai_19099646/ March 3, 2009; 8:45)

The apostle Paul when dealing with the organization of the church issued this statement to the churches. *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior."*⁶ Paul

As leaders you can't tolerate toxic people. I think this is admonition from Paul to his leaders to be aggressive about protecting the environment of the church from toxic people. Get rid of it. This policy is applicable to business. Outbursts which are foolish and spoil the workplace should be offenses which lead to an individual being terminated. In the book ***The Five Dysfunctions of Team*** by Patrick Lencioni, Lencioni talks about the necessity of building trust in the work place. A team that trusts each other will not be absent of conflict rather it will be free to engage in conflict. The character of such discussions in a healthy team allows for disagreement and creative thinking. However, the team is absent of anger and emotionally toxic behavior. Allowing teammates that uses their words aggressively breaks down trust. These must be terminated as necessary.

Getting rid of infected employees goes beyond merely firing a toxic employee. As leaders you have to staff for emotional changes which take place in your workforce. One thing I would encourage every company to do is to find spiritual counselors who are prepared to assist with employees who are going through difficult life changes. If an employee is going through divorce, dealing with loss of some kind, or losing their home do not expect that employee to be that productive and remember their emotional status will infect the rest of their team if they are endeared to them and even if they are not. As leaders you get rid of emotionally toxic environments in your team by finding spiritual advisors to assist you. This step is proactive and in this way you are working toward getting rid of the emotionally toxic work environment by being prepared.

Getting rid of the infected workplace environment requires that you establish values and a code of behavior for your workplace. This may seem a bit severe; however, clearly communicating your expectations for behavior in the workplace is essential. Every employee should know and understand what acceptable behavior in the workplace is. As a leader we cannot assume that employees know right from wrong or understand what is acceptable office behavior or conduct. If you want to get rid of all anger and bitterness in the workplace clearly communicate your expectations for behavior and reward and discipline when necessary.

Evaluate your attitude. This is a big key in getting rid of such behaviors. Leaders have a great influence on the behaviors of their employees. If you have a bad temper you will likely attract bad tempered people. "As goes the leader so goes the followers" Author Unknown. You company will naturally take on the attitude, vision, and values that you hold as a leader. If you want to get rid of the toxic angry words in the workplace begin with you first and do some soul searching.

Finally, do everything you can to prevent yourself from hiring people who are toxic or angry. As a leader you are the primary protector of your workplace. It begins with who you allow to work for you. Hrminguide.com warns leaders about miss firing on hiring.

"Managers at companies, particularly those in which employees often work in teams, should take special care when hiring new employees. This would include checking references and administering personality tests so that those who are really low on agreeableness, emotional stability or conscientiousness are screened out."⁷

Make no apologies for protecting the life and joy of your workplace. Work is a necessity for us, but who said it needs to feel like work.

Let's review. To keep from getting infected you should fire toxic employees when necessary. Second, you should prepare to take care of your employees by providing counselors for emotional situations. Third, you should let your expectations for behavior be known up front. Fourth, you should evaluate how your attitude is affecting the workplace. Lastly, don't hire toxic people.

It's a "No No" to let your workplace be infected with angry or toxic people!

Roundtable:

1. How do angry people diminish productivity in the workplace?
2. Describe a work situation where you were confronted with an angry or toxic individual. How was it handled?
3. What is your policy for behavior in the workplace? Has it been clearly communicated?
4. What was the best work situation you have ever been in? What made it a good place to work?

⁶ (NLT, **Ephesians 4:31** www.biblegateway.com/ March 3, 2009; 8:30 PM)

⁷ <http://www.hrmguide.com/commitment/negative-behavior.htm/> March 4, 2009; 10:35

