

Cliques At Work Can Be Prevented

Most managers and employees work hard to create strong teamwork and camaraderie on the job. The opposite of a strong team occurs when a group of employees form a clique. Clique members typically share negative opinions about employer issues and only those who are like-minded are allowed to belong to this private club.

Within a clique, communication occurs underground, usually without the knowledge of managers or other employees who don't belong to the group. The problems discussed rarely see the light of day and as a result, are perpetuated rather than solved. Employees belonging to the clique usually deny their participation in anything underhanded or destructive. Managers often feel powerless to address the clique's elusive activities.

Two types of problems give rise to cliques. First, there are often underlying organizational or systemic concerns that need to be unearthed, discussed and solved. Long term problems are particularly wearing on employees, especially when everyone seems to know a problem exists and nothing is done to fix it. Not surprisingly, employees who share a common perspective about the issue tend to talk with each other. If nothing is done about the issue, this group can become a clique.

Every group needs a leader and cliques can also form around one or two employees who have a bone to pick with management. These employees are usually not star performers. Some have received critical feedback about their job performance or behaviours at work. Unhappy with how they have been treated, these employees garner support by discussing their concerns with coworkers. In time, a clique forms among those who share similar concerns.

Managers can prevent cliques by creating a safe environment for employees to discuss concerns that are impacting negatively on the workplace. Employees must not fear repercussions when issues are brought to managers' attention. Creating a culture that encourages problem-solving rather than merely problem-finding helps vaccinate the workplace against the growth of cliques.

Finally, managers must ensure they fully address job performance or behavioural issues with employees. If constructive critical feedback does not result in improvement, then further disciplinary action is necessary. Letting performance issues slide or tolerating a rollercoaster of cyclically improved and deteriorating performance, almost guarantees that the bad-apple will try to spoil the bunch.

Paula J. MacLean is the best-selling author of five books focused on improving human resource practices in the workplace. Visit www.silvercreekpress.ca for more information or to send Paula a question.