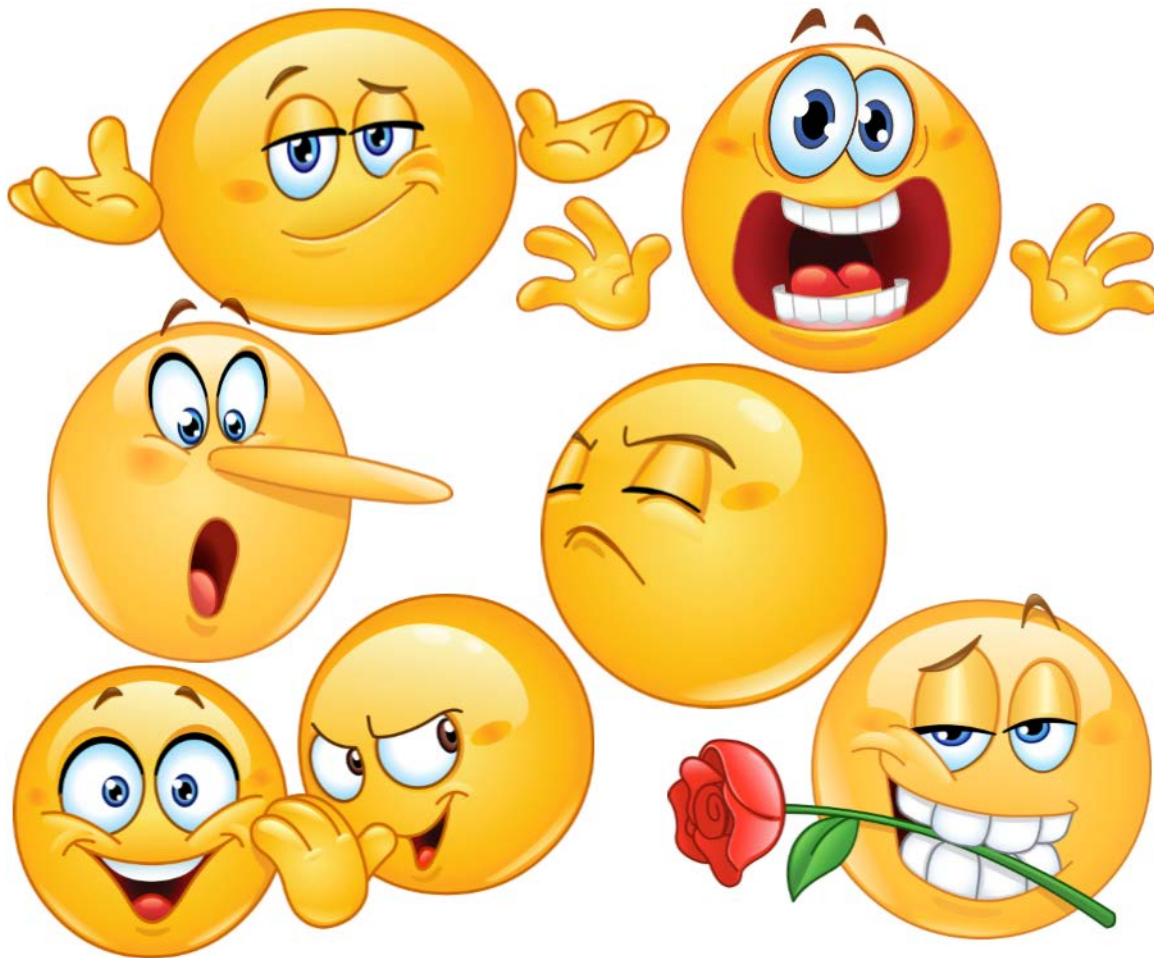


# Grace Judson



## The 5 Most Challenging Employee Types

and how to manage them

*a leadership resource  
from Grace Judson*

~ empowered leadership ~



Grace Judson

# The Five Most Challenging Employee Types ~ and how to manage them ~

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## Introduction

*Most employees –  
even those who  
appear to be  
difficult –  
sincerely want to  
do a good job.*

Wouldn't it be lovely if all employees were cheerful, productive, detail-oriented, responsible, and hard-working?

Most employees sincerely do want to do a good job. In fact, most performance issues don't arise out of any sort of ill intent. Instead, they're usually the result of misunderstanding or a lack of skill, knowledge, or other resources.

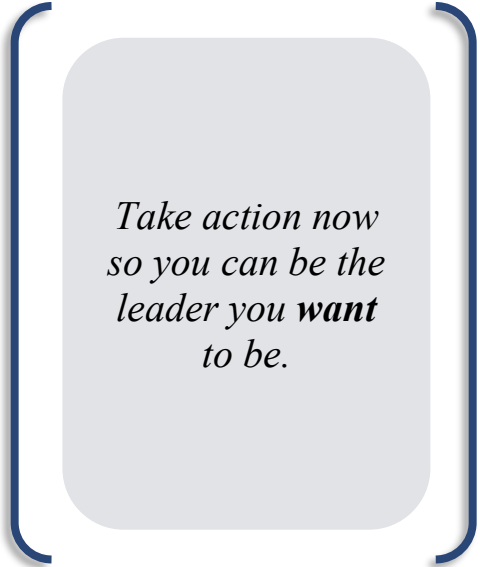
But then there are those employees who are a true challenge for any manager or leader to handle.

It's tempting to turn a blind eye, especially if the challenging employee is otherwise doing good or even excellent job. Your own manager might even suggest letting the behavior slide, given how productive the employee is otherwise.

Don't do it.

Your team feels the impact. When there's a problem employee, everyone on the team knows it. And ignoring the problem, hoping it will go away on its own, or living with it because the employee in question is a star performer in other ways ... doesn't work.

Team productivity inevitably suffers.



*Take action now  
so you can be the  
leader you **want**  
to be.*

The rest of the team will grow more and more resentful that *they're* working hard and doing their best whilst this *other employee* is getting away with poor behavior.

Assuming they're not part of the problem, your manager will eventually become aware there's a problem, and that you're not handling it.

You'll lose credibility as a leader. And you'll wake up one morning and realize *you have become that leader you could never stand ...* the one who doesn't take action when action is needed.

Here are five – plus a bonus sixth – of the most challenging employee types: who they are, how they undermine the team, how *not* to handle them, and what you should do instead.

Some of the suggestions I make will challenge you. Some of them will sound counter-intuitive and maybe even a bit weird.

*Please note: these concepts and ideas are tested and they work. However, the descriptions are, of necessity, generic.*

You'll want to calibrate each one to your situation and your personality type, though I recommend testing them out "as is" before you make adjustments. The tools have been proven in many high-stakes situations. They may seem unusual, but they *work*.

Test the suggestions out with family and friends, and then bring them into the office. (To be clear, I'm not suggesting that your family and friends fall into any of these challenging categories! Just that it's an easy, safe way to practice your skills before bringing them into a high-stakes situation.)

If you have questions, please ask! The best way to reach me is via email: [grace@gracejudson.com](mailto:grace@gracejudson.com).

And my suggestions for managing these five – plus the bonus sixth – also appear on YouTube in their very own video series, which you can find in this playlist:

<http://bit.ly/HowToManageDifficultEmployees>



# 1. The Resentful Power-Grabber

## who they are

When one person (you!) is promoted or awarded a juicy project ... someone else isn't.

And sometimes that "someone else" becomes resentful, suspicious of your good fortune, and obstructive. They may choose to believe they should have been rewarded, but because of political favoritism or some other conspiracy to cheat them, you got it instead.

They tend to be passive-aggressive, resisting what you ask them to do, choosing to "misunderstand" your direction, and undercutting your authority by going over your head with questions or trash-talking you to colleagues.

## how they undermine the team

Whether overt or subtle, the Resentful Power-Grabber's behavior is a direct challenge to your authority and your credibility. The rest of the team will be looking sideways at both of you, waiting to see if you have the strength and confidence to put a stop to this

*The Resentful Power-Grabber's goal is **always** to disagree with you. Therefore, ask questions that serve your purpose when they say No!*

behavior. If the Resentful Power-Grabber actively disagrees with your directives, the team may become confused about what they should be doing. Employees may become so frustrated that they choose to leave.

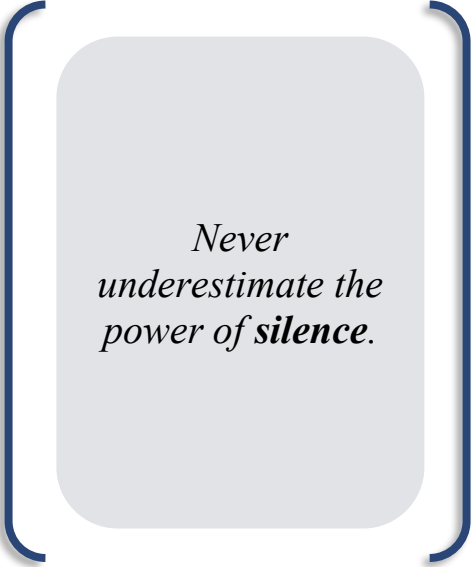
### what not to do

The Resentful Power-Grabber will deny any direct accusation from you. If you tell them to stop undermining your authority with the team, or stop countermanding your direction, or stop going over your head, they'll look innocent and claim to have no idea what you're talking about. So don't confront them directly about their behavior.

### what to do

If the Resentful Power-Grabber is making a habit of going over your head, start by asking your boss to refer the Resentful Power-Grabber's questions or requests back to you.

The Resentful Power-Grabber is in a habitual rut of disagreeing with you, so trying to get them to say "Yes" to anything is bound to fail. The counter-intuitive process of going for a "No!" answer can be wonderfully effective. Think about what you can ask that will *serve your purpose when they say "No."* These questions change the whole trajectory of the conversation.



*Never  
underestimate the  
power of **silence**.*

“Is it unreasonable of me to expect you to double-check with me before telling the team what to do?”

“Am I crazy to expect you to follow through on [your job / what I’ve asked / completing this project / whatever it is that you need them to do]?”

And so on. Use these as a template to design questions that are relevant for your situation.

When you ask a no-oriented question, STOP. PAUSE. WAIT. Let the Resentful Power-Grabber take in what you’re asking. Be comfortable with silence. Give them at least 15 seconds.

They will almost certainly say “No” – but even if they don’t, and even if they haven’t answered at all, ask this next question:

“So, how do we move forward from here?”

Notice that these no-oriented questions are not the direct confrontation I said not to do, because they assume that everyone knows the behavior is happening.

### **when you don’t have management support**

If you don’t feel as if your manager will support your request to re-route the Resentful Power-Grabber’s end-run around you, you’ll need to address the issue directly. In this case, seek the “no” answer as described above. “Is it unreasonable of me to expect



you to come to me first?” or “Am I crazy to think that you should have brought this issue to me, before going to my manager?”, for instance. And then follow up with “So, how do we move forward from here?”

As always, fine-tune this to align with your specific situation.



## 2. The Drama King or Queen

### who they are

The Drama King or Queen is an expert at making mountains out of molehills. Any problem, whether in their personal life or part of the task or project they're engaged in, becomes a freakout-worthy disaster.

Their work is hampered by their inability to achieve perspective and problem-solve.

### how they undermine the team

Anxiety and fear are contagious. Even if the Drama King or Queen is known by all to be an over-reactor, their emotionality will inevitably increase everyone's stress – even if only because they have to deal with the fallout. Therefore, the team will typically operate at unnecessary levels of vigilance and tension. Productivity will drop and the overall enjoyment and engagement of the team will suffer.

### what not to do

Don't get sucked into the drama! The Drama King or Queen loves to have someone to emote to (or at!). They love telling their story,

*It can be weirdly  
fun, and therefore  
tempting, to join  
in the chaos.  
Don't!*

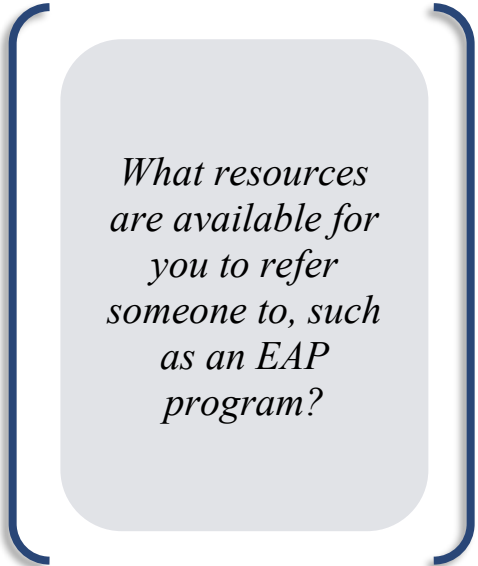
and in telling (and re-telling) it, will become ever more involved in their own emotionality.

### what to do

The Drama King or Queen usually has an unexpressed need at the root of their behavior, but it can be hard to find. However, in many cases, they feel – consciously or not – that the only way they ever get attention, are heard, or receive the help they feel they need is if they make a big deal out of something.

If their drama is about a personal situation, explain that they're sharing TMI – too much information – and making their co-workers, including you, uncomfortable with the level of intimate detail that they're revealing. They'll probably declare that *they* are fine with this "vulnerability" (which, of course, isn't actually vulnerability). Stand firm on your position that other people are *not* fine with it. If your organization has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that covers confidential counseling, you can refer them to that for assistance.

If the drama is work-related, they may be reacting to feelings of overwhelm and stress, whether because they believe they're being given too much to do without enough help, or because they're uncertain about how to do the tasks they've been assigned.



*What resources are available for you to refer someone to, such as an EAP program?*

*Don't rescue the Drama King or Queen. Instead, problem-solve in partnership.*

The next time they're indulging in work-related drama, bring them into your office or into a conference room where you can close the door. Ask curious questions to uncover the actual problem – too much to do and not sure how to prioritize? tasks outside their area of expertise? really, truly too much to do and no way to get it done by the assigned deadline? a personal problem at home that may be draining time and energy? or whatever it might be.

Then ask, “What result do you want from this conversation?”

When they answer, listen carefully. Then say something along these lines: “I get what you're asking for, and think I can help. But first I have another question: do you really think that how you've been venting at me is the best way to get the help you want?”

Put the responsibility for solving the problem back on them as much as possible, because often part of the Drama King or Queen's goal is to get someone else to take ownership of the situation. It can take time – both in the moment to solve an immediate problem, and over weeks or months to turn down the drama volume on a consistent basis – but if the employee is valuable to your team, it can be a worthwhile effort.



## 3. The Slacker

### who they are

The Slacker always has a reason (a.k.a. an excuse) for why they're late getting to work, missed a project deadline, or just flat-out can't do what you've asked them to do.

They call in sick, take long lunch breaks, extended coffee breaks, can often be found hanging out in someone else's cubicle or office, and regularly leave early. The quality of their work is *okay*, but never great, and may be missing details.

*The Slacker's ability to get away with doing less than is required is usually a highly-developed skill.*

### how they undermine the team

The Slacker creates frustration wherever they go. Whether it's your annoyance at not being able to trust them to do their job or their co-workers' irritation at having to pick up the slack (pun intended), this employee is more than just a minor nuisance. When the Slacker isn't dealt with, the rest of the team becomes resentful and demotivated, and will lose respect for you as their leader.

## what not to do

Stay away from what's called "ad hominem" accusations. These are attacks on the individual rather than on their behavior. No matter how much you may think the Slacker is lazy, unmotivated, and generally a poor excuse for an employee, don't say that to them (or anyone else). The only constructive discussion is about specific, fact-based behaviors.

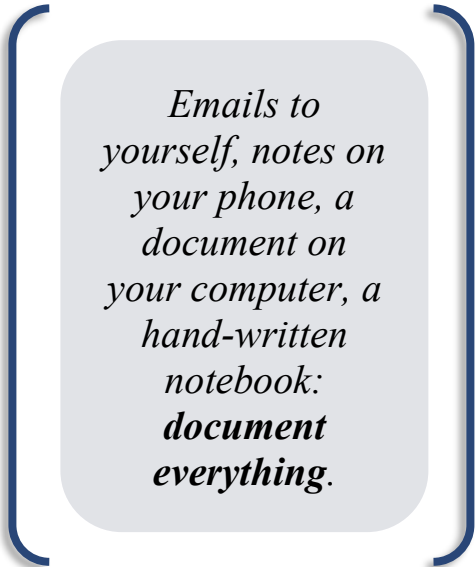
## what to do

Before talking to the Slacker, document instances of unacceptable behavior. This could be a list of days they came in late (note the time they arrived), extended lunch breaks, missed deadlines, and so on.

Make a second list that details what you want them to do differently – and I do mean details. Not just "be on time," but "arrive in the office no later than 9:00 a.m. every workday."

But don't make your list too long. Even if there are many issues, pick the top three; any more is overwhelming. You can catch up with the others later – and you may find that in solving the worst instances, the rest start to disappear.

Make a third list of consequences. What will happen if the Slacker doesn't live up to these expectations?



*Emails to yourself, notes on your phone, a document on your computer, a hand-written notebook: **document everything.***

*Be absolutely clear about consequences **and** about the follow-up meeting.*

Meet privately with the Slacker. Begin the meeting by reviewing the details of their unacceptable behavior. Then say, "Going forward, I expect ..." and review the second list.

Ask, "What do you understand about what I've requested? And why do you think this is important?"

Use curious questions to lead them to awareness of the importance of what you're asking them to do. Helping someone come to the conclusion you want them to reach – rather than flat-out telling them what it is – will bring them to a much more clear understanding and even agreement, versus just saying "yes" to what you say in order to get out of the meeting.

Review the list of consequences with them. If you feel like you truly have their agreement about creating change, you can invite them to set consequences for themselves, but be careful with this and be sure you agree with what they suggest.

Finally, always set a date for a follow-up meeting in which you'll review the Slacker's progress. Hopefully by then they'll no longer fall into the Slacker category!



## 4. The Gossip

### who they are

The gossip *loves* sharing stories about everyone else in the office, especially those in power, and typically has a little bit of Drama King or Queen in their personality.

Don't mistake the Resentful Power-Grabber for the Gossip. They may both tell tales, but the Gossip is indiscriminate about who they talk about; the Resentful Power-Grabber sticks to stories about you.

*There is **always** going to be gossip and a rumor-mill. But you don't need to allow anyone to feed it.*

### how they undermine the team

The Gossip does more than just waste their own and others' time; they undermine morale and degrade engagement and employee satisfaction. Team members grow concerned about what the Gossip might be saying about *them*. If the Gossip is buzzing about executive decisions and organizational strategy, people may start wondering what's actually going on, and why you, as their leader, haven't told them anything. Trust decreases, which, of course, also undermines productivity and job satisfaction.



*Communicate,  
communicate,  
communicate.  
Even if your  
communication  
consists of, “I  
can’t tell you yet,  
but I will when I  
can.”*

### what not to do

I hope this is obvious: don’t participate in gossip. You lose credibility and become untrustworthy.

### what to do

The more you can tell your team what’s going on, the less the Gossip will have to say about company-related issues. Communicate with your team frequently and clearly, in multiple channels (email, in-person meetings, and even video), about what’s happening, especially if there are big changes underway. People want to know – you know this, because *you* want to know – and having a big-picture view helps silence the Gossip *and* helps everyone understand their jobs better.

Is the Gossip acting out of fear (“I don’t know what’s going on, so I’m going to latch on to every rumor and spread it around to see if it’s true”) or out of a desire to be in the spotlight (“I know more than anyone else about what’s going on and who’s doing what, so I’m going to spread it all around so people know how clued-in I am”)?

If it’s fear-based, help them understand how they’re actually making things worse. Explain, to them and your entire team, as clearly as possible, within the range of any confidentiality concerning plans you can’t share, the truth of what’s happening.

*Don't expect  
rational thought  
or behavior from  
someone in the  
grip of an  
emotional  
reaction.*

If they're afraid for their job, be honest about the situation; if a restructuring or reorganization could include a layoff, be as transparent as you can without sharing news that's not yet for public consumption.

Be aware that people in an emotionally reactive state usually can't process logic; when the emotional centers of the brain are highly activated, the logical centers shut down, so don't expect them to be responsive to reason.

If they're looking for the spotlight, redirect their energies. Additional work is one way to decrease the time available for gossiping! And if their performance justifies it, you can provide healthier spotlight opportunities such as making a presentation to the team or receiving public recognition for work well done.



## 5. The Harasser

### who they are

Ugh. We all know who they are, especially these days with the #metoo movement and the number of public figures and celebrities who are being called out.

That said, there are two important things to remember.

One is that the Harasser is often subtle and hard to catch in action. Many times the Harasser's target will try to shrug it off, telling themselves that it shouldn't be a big deal, they need to suck it up, they're over-reacting, and so on.

The second is that reporting a Harasser can be nerve-racking. Even in organizations where there are clear reporting processes and defined consequences for the Harasser, the target often has significant fears about not being taken seriously or of retaliation.

### how they undermine the team

Whether the harassment is bullying (which is not currently covered by law in most U.S. states) or sexual (which is illegal in the U.S. as well as in many other countries), the Harasser's target begins to dread coming to work. Their productivity suffers, both

*Does your organization have policies covering behavior **and** reporting? Do you know what they are?*

in output and in quality. Valuable employees may choose to leave rather than put up with the situation. And as with all management challenges, the rest of the team inevitably knows something's going on, and will be watching to see how you deal with it.

### what not to do

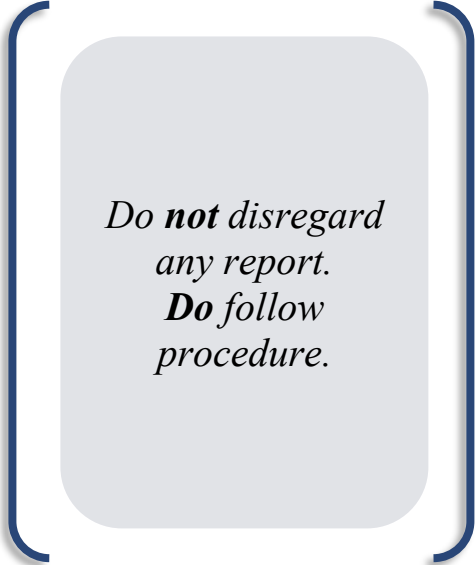
If someone is reporting harassment to you, never dismiss them as complainers, over-reactors, or crybabies.

And never let the Harasser know who has reported their behavior to you. It may have to become clear in the course of an investigation, and you may be part of that investigation, but until then, maintain confidentiality.

### what to do

If an employee comes to you and reports that they're being harassed, ask them to document the behavior in detail if they haven't already done so. This should be in written form, with dates, times, and descriptions of the behavior; if possible, include names of witnesses, whether or not they intervened. Do not keep these notes at the office; use a home computer or a notebook kept at home.

(If you're the one being harassed, you obviously need to create the same documentation.)



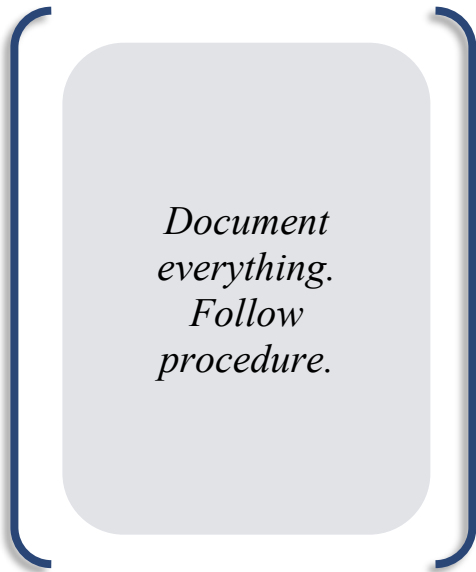
*Do **not** disregard  
any report.  
**Do** follow  
procedure.*

Depending on the severity of the situation and whether the Harasser's target is willing to give it a try, you can use some of the same "no-oriented" questions as described earlier. For instance, "Is it unreasonable of me to expect you to keep your hands to yourself?" and "Am I crazy to think maybe you don't know what 'no, I don't want to go out with you' means?"

But please, don't encourage confrontation if there's the slightest hesitation or suspicion that this could increase the risk factors involved.

Generally speaking, when someone makes a harassment complaint, you need to report it.

If your organization has a harassment policy (and it should; if it doesn't, ask your HR department why!), follow its procedure to the letter. This will probably include taking the documentation to your manager and to the appropriate HR resource, both of whom should take responsibility for investigating and resolving the issue. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, resolution can range from a warning to firing the Harasser, based on the severity of the issue and company policy. It should *never* include doing nothing; even if the investigation fails to prove the complaint, some action needs to be taken. This is where your HR resource is, hopefully, the expert who can guide you throughout the process.



*Document  
everything.  
Follow  
procedure.*

As a general practice and preventive measure, consider training your team on Bystander Intervention. While recent studies have shown that sexual harassment prevention training isn't as effective as we'd like to think, teaching employees how to intervene when they see harassment happening can be much more effective.

### when you don't have management support

My first impulse is to say – find another job. An organization that doesn't support a quick and thorough investigation of a harassment accusation isn't one I think anyone should be working for!

However, I understand that this may not be an option.

If your management isn't supportive and your HR representative isn't taking action, you have two options (not mutually exclusive).

Confronting the Harasser yourself, beyond the no-oriented questions outlined above, can put you at risk, and if the Harasser isn't a direct report to you, this option isn't even on the table. The risk, of course, is that the Harasser can become vindictive and file their own complaint with management and HR – and there are plenty of other types of retaliation. This is a call you need to make for yourself.



*Be careful about  
confrontation!*

In situations where you choose not to confront the Harasser, you'll probably need to hire an employment lawyer, but first do some research on options you may have within your state or local jurisdiction.



## Bonus: The Cheater

### who they are

The dishonest employee's behavior ranges from lying about their previous experience to fraud, embezzlement, thievery, and a host of other corrupt actions.

It's worth noting, by the way, that taking office supplies home with you (what one unscrupulous person I knew many years ago called "unconscious donations") is *theft*, no matter how many people in your organization do it.

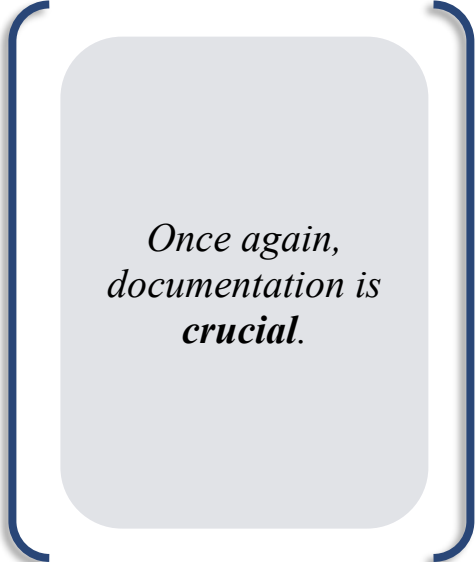
*Dishonest and unethical behavior starts small, but can grow to highly unexpected extremes!*

### how they undermine the team

Unethical behavior doesn't just happen overnight; instead, it's a slow slide, one incremental step after another. Case studies of situations such as the Enron scandal in 2004 and the Wells Fargo account fraud in 2016 show that it's never one employee, and never one single action, that causes such a complete meltdown.

Obviously (I hope!) you're not dealing with anything on that level. However, be aware that dishonesty tends to breed dishonesty. If the team sees one person getting away with, for instance, padding their expense account, they'll start to think about how they might





*Once again,  
documentation is  
crucial.*

do the same. Trust erodes because people have something to hide – and, as always, your credibility as a leader suffers.

### **what not to do**

Don't ignore the Cheater's behavior. Your corporate culture may tolerate taking the occasional pen or pad of paper, but anything beyond that must be handled – swiftly and unequivocally.

### **what to do**

Gather proof. Document what's happening, and make sure your proof isn't just your opinion or your word against the Cheater's. The last thing you want is to get into a he said / she said situation.

Once you have indisputable evidence, take it first to your manager, and then to the appropriate person in your Human Resources department. The Cheater needs to be fired, but you'll need to cover the legal bases and work within your organizational policies and procedures.

### **when you don't have management support**

It's sad but true that when an employee is otherwise stellar, management often resists firing them, even with substantial cause. Obviously the more egregious the Cheater's behavior, the more likely they are to be let go. But if their actions are viewed as minor or insignificant, while their productivity is viewed as

*No support?  
Make the case for  
what the Cheater  
is costing the  
company!*

important to the organization, you may have some challenges ahead of you.

There's loads of research available from highly-respected sources that shows how a problem employee, no matter how productive, negatively impacts morale, other employees' productivity, and in reality is actually *not* worthwhile. With just a little effort, you can find reports and studies that will back up your position that firing the Cheater will, in the long run, and probably even in the shorter term, be beneficial to the organization as a whole. Do your research, craft a solid case, and present it to your management and your HR representative.

## About the Author: Grace Judson



I'm a leadership geek, trainer, speaker, coach, and consultant focusing on first-line and recently-promoted managers and supervisors, helping them cross that daunting gap between being *part* of a team, and *leading* a team.

Drawing on my 25 years of corporate experience – including 16 years of executive leadership – plus 14 years of leadership coaching, I work with individuals, teams, and leaders to develop their skills, helping them become the empowered leaders they want to be – and their teams deserve.

I help executives in midsize companies turn their managers into leaders, building humane, high-performing, profitable teams that attract and retain

top talent.

And I hasten to point out that I'm not as old as all those years of experience might indicate. After all, I started my career as a two-year-old, turning my parents' faces toward each other when they argued, wanting them to *see* each other instead of fighting. That was the beginning of my lifelong quest to understand what makes people tick – and what makes a good, or even great, leader.

As a recovering executive myself, I know very well what it's like to be in the trenches as a leader and manager, trying to make the best-possible decisions in the heat of the moment – and trying to figure out how to manage challenging employees. Without experience, those moments are difficult, but they make the difference between an on-time, top-quality project with a motivated, inspired, high-performing team ... and missed deadlines with demoralized employees.

Experience is essential.

It doesn't have to be painful.

You can short-cut the process with the right support.

I was in the corporate world for over 25 years, 16 of which were in leadership and senior executive roles. I've been a trainer and coach since 2005, and I've helped more clients than I can count – helped them discover their leadership style, let go of feeling like a fraud or imposter, develop the skills to be confident leaders – and find meaning and joy in their leadership role.

The tools presented in this guide are part of a powerful, confident leader's repertoire. And they're just a small taste of the learning available.

## WANT MORE?

There's a full YouTube playlist for these Challenging Employee Types [right here](#).

Are you looking for your next step in becoming a respected, effective, strong leader?

How about the eight-module *Empowered Leadership* program?

<https://www.gracejudson.com/empowered-leadership-program/>.



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