

Managing employees who hate each other.

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Employing staff isn't always about allocating tasks and setting deadlines. Sometimes it's about managing personalities. And as many small business owners can attest, those personalities don't always get along.

Resolving problems when employees are in conflict takes a skilful people manager who knows how to approach such situations with an open mind. Empathy is required to dissolve conflict because it's usually a product of miscommunication or misunderstanding between employees.

It's also an unavoidable part of employing and managing people. It would be a rare occurrence for a workplace to be harmonious all of the time. That's why successfully managing feuding employees and diffusing conflict takes skill and strategy. Let's take a look at some of the skills you need to navigate these delicate situations.

Take control of the situation.

If employees are disrupting the productivity of the workplace, it's time to take charge of the situation through appropriate management action. It is important any internal unrest does not escalate out of control, interfering with other employees and cause other problems for your business.

Also be wary, toxic employee relationships can be influential, causing increased tension, negativity and stress amongst workers, and this can be detrimental to the culture of your workplace. Remain conscious and keep an eye out for disputes whether they are big or small.

Find the facts.

When employees are feuding, employers need to investigate to reveal the pressure points for involved parties. What was the dispute in relation to? Was it to do with workload or a particular work project? There will be conflicting opinions and various versions of a story to wade through, which will take time and patience. But getting to the bottom of the dispute can highlight what needs to change in order to reach a satisfactory resolution.

Let all parties have their say.

It is important to provide equal opportunity to each employee involved and give them a chance to explain their view. Ensure that you invite each party to a meeting where they have an opportunity to recount the situation.

While initiating such difficult conversations can be tricky and confronting, it is the first step towards resolving the issue.

Encourage open discussion.

Compromising and learning the reasons behind each person's views can clear the air between the employees and help mend the relationship. Poor working relationships between employees can fester, and potentially impact on the business, as well as the physical and mental welfare of all employees. Starting this process early is an important step in making sure matters do not deteriorate beyond the point of repair.

Source witnesses.

Ask any witnesses to come forward. If the dispute involved significant wrong doing, or if the dispute involved a breach in the employment contract or business policies and procedures, this is serious and could result in dismissal. Witnesses can help to clarify the details of a dispute, particularly where conflicting versions of an incident have been raised by the parties involved, and can also help build a case to support a dismissal if the situation warrants it.

Incident report.

Document every detail. Employers need to fill out an incident report for any wrong doing in the workplace. By putting the specifics of the dispute in writing, employers can support their actions and submit this as evidence if the need arises. In addition, should a dispute happen again or if the dispute is legally escalated, the employer will have supporting evidence to draw back on.

Coach and support.

Offer the feuding employees some development coaching, with the aim of building an awareness of their communication skills and the behaviours that could be contributing to conflict. Some employees may even appreciate the investment you are making in them. This approach has the added benefit of potentially future-proofing your business against disputes caused by something as simple as a skill gap.

Get expert advice.

It's easy for conflict in the workplace to escalate to claims of bullying or harassment, leaving your business exposed and potentially liable. Sometimes professional HR advice is the only way to reach a satisfactory solution that resolves the situation while protecting your business.

In order to manage disputes in the workplace, every employer should show their commitment to policies and procedures in each and every incident. By doing so you can ensure your team dedicates themselves to meeting the expectations of your business free from the stress of workplace conflict.

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