

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1576 Negativity Isn't a Good Look on You

Did you ever work around someone who is almost always negative? This is a person who will find fault in something, where others simply see it all as positive. It reminds me of a news reporter 2,000 years ago, having learned that Jesus Christ walked on water during a storm on the Sea of Galilee, published a story with a headline, "Jesus Can't Swim." These people are among us. I'm Jerry Roberts, and today, we'll look at how we can get along with these people, and avoid becoming one of them. That's coming next on The Extra Point.

We've all encountered them — the coworker who constantly complains, criticizes, and spreads negativity throughout the workplace.

A name is used to describe the women who fit this description...Debbie Downer. They can be a real drain on morale and productivity, leaving their coworkers feeling frustrated and even discouraged.

Strangely, there is no widely accepted male equivalent to Debbie Downer. Some people have tried Negative Ned, Pessimistic Pete, and Grumpy Gus, but none of those work like Debbie does.

In the business classic *First, Break All the Rules*, authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman describe these perpetually dissatisfied employees as "CAVE dwellers".

Now wait, before you head off on a tangent, CAVE, C, A, V, E, is an acronym. It stands for Consistently Against Virtually Everything.

These people have an unrelenting negativity that can cause problems in any office environment.

While some of their gripes may be legitimate, their overall toxic attitude is ultimately counterproductive. As Buckingham and Coffman famously advised, "People don't change that much. Don't waste time trying to put in what was left out. Try to draw out what was left in. That is hard enough."

Translated, that means we should focus on employee strengths rather than weaknesses. By harnessing natural talents and providing opportunities to do more of what workers are good at, organizations can boost productivity, retention, and overall job satisfaction.

But what about those stubborn Debbies, Neds, Gus' and anyone else you want to throw into the mix? Is there any hope of turning their attitude around?

According to Jamil Zaki, a Stanford University psychology professor and author of the forthcoming book *Hope for Cynics*, the answer to that question is maybe. To turn that question mark into a yes, it will require a patient, multifaceted approach.

Zaki's research suggests that if employees are willing to examine their assumptions and experiment with placing trust in others, they can indeed improve their outlook and behavior.

The key is to avoid getting drawn into the negative spiral. Recommending alternative approaches or even facilitating a transfer to a more suitable role could reengage a checked-out team member.

So what if the negativity is chronic and nothing you do has any impact? There are times when the best course of action is to help the worker exit the organization. Chronic negativity can be contagious, and sometimes the needs of the business outweigh the ability to turn around a person who has no interest in turning around.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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