

Reducing Conflict 16 The Passive Aggressive

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



The passive aggressive is an interesting and frustrating type of personality. The person may seem moody or detached from reality. He or she may avoid other people at times. Sulking, backhanded compliments, procrastination, withdrawal, and refusal to communicate are all signs of passive aggression.

When passive aggressive people are called out for being negative or angry, they often will express denial. What they are really doing is trying to shut down communication so they do not have to face the issue.

What Causes People to be Passive Aggressive at Work

There are several things that can give rise to Passive Aggressive behavior. If the person feels under-appreciated or oppressed at work, it can cause the symptoms. Workload is also an issue. If leaders create unreasonable expectations for what can be accomplished or fail to give the proper support, then people are going to push back in various ways.

Sometimes the problem stems back to some parental or scholastic abuse where the child did not feel welcome expressing ideas or concerns.

The person may be naturally lazy and inclined to procrastinate whenever given a difficult task. It may be a way to punish the person asking for the work or just a ploy to put off unrewarding tasks as long as possible.

The person may feel he or she is being unfairly singled out to do more than his or her fair share of the work.

How to Help a Passive Aggressive Person at Work

There are a number of ways to cope with a passive aggressive person, and some will work for one individual and not another. You have to experiment with different techniques.

Sometimes just paying a little more attention to the person or giving some positive feedback will cause movement in the right direction. Also, peer pressure or coaching can be useful ways to shift the thinking pattern. Sometimes it just takes working with a partner.

I think the best way to cope with a passive aggressive person is to find the triggers that light up the person's enthusiasm. Get to know the person better. Find out when he or she is really excited to tackle a difficult task. I believe there are situations where we all will light up and dive into the work with pleasure. Find out the key to this person's motivation and see if you can supply more of that ingredient.

Some people will light up when given a significant challenge. Others may be motivated by some form of reward. Still, others may just be seeking recognition for their good work. If you can find the motivational key and provide more of that factor, you can often change the annoying behaviors.

It is one of the most satisfying aspects of leadership to take a person who has passive aggressive behavior patterns and help the person out of the funk. It is possible if you stick with it and refrain from badgering the individual.

Free Video

Here is a 3-minute video that contains more information on how to deal with a Passive Aggressive.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FPOFxVaxTc>

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003), 2. Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online (2006), 3. Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind (2009), and 4. Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change (2014). In addition, he has authored over 1000 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.