

The Dark Side of HR



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- Nightmare Employees – Practical tools for handling your scariest challenges
- Haunted Houses – Clearing out gossip and other toxic spirits from your culture
- You, in the Role of the Villain – When leadership makes you feel like a monster

Nightmare Employees

Practical tools for handling your scariest
challenges



Nightmare Employee - The Energy Vampire

Colin constantly drains the team by complaining about every change or decision and predicts failure at every turn. Morale dips as coworkers start avoiding him – or worse, they are bitten and begin to join him!

Tool: SBI (Situation, Behavior, Impact) feedback model

1. Situation – Set the stage with specifics
2. Behavior – Describe what you observed
3. Impact – Share how it affected others or the team

Nightmare Employee - The Vanishing Act

Sophie, normally a star performer, suddenly begins showing up late, missing deadlines, and seems to not be mentally present even when she is physically there. The rest of the team is left to pick up slack.

Tool: Performance Improvement Plan

1. Start with clarity, not assumptions
2. Ask before you tell
3. Collaborate on the path forward
4. Document and follow up
5. Balance accountability with support

Nightmare Employee - The Legal Goblin

Cheryl was recently given a final warning for poor attendance. She frequently calls in for seemingly benign issues such as headaches, car issues, or sick kiddos. When she received final warning, she made a claim that she is suffering with a protected disability.

Tool: The Legal Shield

(for any legally protected concern - disability, harassment, discrimination)

1. Protect yourself before there is a problem.
 - Job descriptions, clear policies/procedures, system of documentation
2. Engage HR immediately if you have it, but if not...
3. Pause discipline while the concern is evaluated/investigated.
4. Ensure unbiased, fair, non-retaliatory, and consistent treatment
5. Ask yourself, “What would our response be if the employee wasn’t protected?”

Haunted Houses

Clearing out gossip and other toxic spirits from your culture



Haunted Houses – The Gossip Ghost

The gossip ghost drifts through the office as a cluster of employees, whispering about coworkers and speculating on business decisions – creating an eerie cloud of distrust and distraction that unsettles the team.

Tool: Address-Redirect-Replace method

1. Address the behavior – be direct and specific
 - I've noticed side conversations happening about the recent changes I've implemented.
2. Redirect – Shift the focus away from unhelpful framing
 - Instead of whispering concerns to others, please bring those issues directly to me or raise them in our team meeting, so we can discuss them openly.
3. Replace – Replace with a solution-focused statement
 - A strong team is built on open communication. Let's commit to voicing concerns in the open rather than in whispers.

Haunted Houses – The Mediocrity Monster

Sally is a manager who quietly tolerates poor performance – ignoring missed deadlines, overlooking subpar work, and excusing poor attendance habits – allowing mediocrity to spread through the team until even the top performers lose motivation.

Tool: The Accountability Accelerator

1. Reset expectations, reinforce standards and requirements
2. Schedule (and hold) 1:1 meetings regularly
3. Use coaching & progressive discipline tools
4. Recognize & reinforce high performance
5. Model accountability

Haunted Houses – The Favorites Phantom

Dan is a manager who, dazzled by a star performer's brilliance, showers them with extra praise and opportunities – unintentionally haunting the rest of the team with feelings of being overlooked and undervalued.

Tool: The Transparent Standard

- ✓ Define key results that lead to other opportunities and rewards.
- ✓ Share standards openly and publicly explain why the star earns recognition.
- ✓ Encourage all team members to identify their own opportunities to shine.



You, in the Role of the Villain

When leadership makes you
feel like a monster



The Villain – The Executioner

Sheila has been with the practice for over 20 years. She's as sweet as can be and brings homemade treats for the team every Friday. The practice has implemented new software, and Sheila is seriously struggling.

Tool: Supported Performance Improvement Plan – a PIP with a serious dose of development

1. Start with appreciation
2. Explain the business need
3. Introduce the support
4. Clarify Accountability
5. End with Encouragement

The Villain – The Puppet Master

You must secretly pull the strings (reassign work, change procedures, shift priorities) to prepare for upcoming an upcoming acquisition which cannot yet be announced.

Tool: The Transparency Trigger

1. Ask, “What can I share now?”
2. Get a sounding board in HR or a trusted peer
3. Set a disclosure timeline, and stick to it
4. Explain the “why” after the fact

The Villain – The Terminator

You must terminate an employee because you've discovered they hid serious business issues. That employee happens to be currently on maternity leave.

Tool: The Consistency Compass

1. Separate the Issues
2. Confirm compliance and consistency
3. Communicate concisely and with facts
4. Show respect
5. Protect the team

The Wrap Up

What do all these methods have in common?

- ✓ Clear
- ✓ Respectful
- ✓ Action-oriented

What do all these methods avoid?

- ✗ Personal judgement
- ✗ Harshness
- ✗ Vague expectations



Thank

you!

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