



## Overcome Individual and Team Negativity

Pessimists and fault finders, critics and scapegoats, not-my-jobbers and rumor-mongers, every organization has them. These are the individuals who undermine current operations and cripple long-term growth by their attitudes. In his book *Managing Workplace Negativity*, author Gary S. Topchik offers some strategies to address these nonproductive behaviors.

**Strategy #1: Recognize the Trigger Points.** If you can determine the hot buttons, you can prevent the disruptive behavior.

**Strategy #2: Take a Timeout.** Five or ten minutes away from a stressful situation can do wonders.

**Strategy #3: Keep Thoughts in the Present.** If your staff member focuses more on the present, he or she will have a more positive attitude.

**Strategy #4: Set Ground Rules.** This works especially well to prevent negativity during team meetings. Ground rules set by team members can discourage temper tantrums and other behavior that can derail team effort.

**Strategy #5: Provide a New Opportunity or Skill.** A great way to get staff out of a bad mood is to provide them with a new learning opportunity.

This article is adapted from *Managing Workplace Negativity* by Gary S. Topchik. Published by AMACOM, AMA's book division. For more information about this book and others, visit [www.amanet.org/books](http://www.amanet.org/books)

## Strategies for Effective Problem Solving

BY LONNIE PACELLI

As you strive to accomplish your individual and organizational goals, you will encounter many challenges along the way. Sometimes these challenges will seem overwhelming. As an executive, however, it's up to you to determine which problems are the most pressing, which steps you need to take to solve them and how you can motivate your staff to support your efforts.

Basically, problems come in two forms. They can be either a barrier to accomplishing a task or an opportunity to do something better. Both types involve a desire to achieve something tomorrow that can't be done today. The easy part is identifying the challenge. The trickier part is coming up with a detailed appropriate solution.

Toward that, here are five steps to follow:

**Step #1: Have a clearly articulated mission statement.** In your mission statement, you need to include what needs to be done, when it needs to be done and what measure will be used to evaluate its success.

**Step #2: Have a consistent understanding of the problem.** Include everyone who will be involved in the project in early problem solving, even if they initially resist. You can usually get the people's support if they feel included in the process from the very beginning.

**Step #3: Make sure the problem is the most pressing one.** Once a year, hold



a staff meeting and create a "wish list" of all known problems. For each entry, name the problem, list the resources it will require, the expected outcome and the deadline for solving it. Then rank the entries by

their urgency. Remember that priorities change—projects that were originally put on the back burner can suddenly become fires that need to be extinguished immediately. Review the list at least quarterly.

**Step #4: Keep your mission statement prominently displayed.** A mission statement serves no purpose if it is left in a drawer to collect dust. Make sure each member of your staff has a copy. Enlarge it and hang it in your office. Each time you hold a meeting about a problem, have your mission statement handy and

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## AMA Survey Facts

The Human Resource Institute, in conjunction with the American Management Association, conducted the *HR Outsourcing Practitioner Consensus Survey*. Of those who outsource one or more HR functions:

**18.5%** said that they expected to gain the advantage of outside expertise.

**26.8%** said that they did it to save money.

**26.8%** noted an improvement in service delivery.

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remind the group of the goal to keep them on task.

**Step #5: Don't be afraid to change the mission.** No business is static; priorities can change from month to month. When problems change, revise your mission statement accordingly. Just make sure you involve the entire team in setting the new mission, defining the revised timeframe and re-allocating resources.

Lonnie Pacelli has over 20 years of project management experience at both Accenture and Microsoft and is the author of *The Project Management Advisor—18 Major Project Screw-Ups and How to Cut Them Off at the Pass*. Contact info: [www.projectmanagementadvisor.com](http://www.projectmanagementadvisor.com)

For more solutions to management problems, check out the management and project management seminars at AMA's Website: [www.amanet.org/seminars](http://www.amanet.org/seminars)

## Avoid Bypassing

Successful communication can be torpedoed by "bypassing." What's bypassing? It occurs when the speaker and listener in a conversation define work differently or they use different words that they define the same way.

In the first case, they may think they agree when they actually don't. In the second case, they may think they disagree when they actually don't.

To prevent bypassing, try these four techniques:

1. If your listener appears not to understand what you just said, restate your most important points using different words.

2. Ask open-ended questions that presume your receiver didn't understand and encourage him or her to say so.

3. If you're communicating in writing, follow up an important memo or report with a one-on-one conversation to address any misunderstandings.

4. If you're on the receiving end of a message, use a reflective summary. The sender's response to your summary of what you believe you heard will help you confirm if you truly understood what was said.

For more information on how to improve communications, visit AMA's Website: [www.amanet.org/seminars/communications](http://www.amanet.org/seminars/communications)

## Some Insights into Benchmarking

Benchmarking allows you to compare practices with those of acknowledged industry leaders in order to identify opportunities for your organization to improve.

In the book *The Portable Mentor*, Cy Charney describes how it is done.

The first stage, planning, involves raising six questions:

### 1. What do you want to benchmark?

Charney suggests you take cues from problem areas like sales, market share, costs, returns and customer complaints.

**2. What information do you need?** Here you need to determine which issues are most important, consider quality, speed, cost effectiveness, safety, morale and the like.

**3. Who will collect the data?** For the benchmarking effort to be both objective and accurate, you need two or more people. Include colleagues who have done benchmarking and similar studies before, will be authorizing the resulting changes in operation and/or will be implementing the changes.

**4. How will you collect the data?** Methods include printed survey forms, interviews in person or by telephone and observation of work environments.

**5. How will you record the data?** The benchmarking team will need to develop one or all of the following: appropriate questions, survey forms, and data collection checklists or record sheets.

**6. Where will you get the data?** Possible sources include professional or industry associations, published articles and books, trade shows and associates in the industry who once worked for the firm.

The second stage, organizing, involves two steps:

**First, you need to hold a meeting with team members to develop your benchmark plan.** Get as many people involved as possible, to "spread" the ownership.

**Second, find information sources.** In some instances, says Charney, you might solicit co-operation by offering to share your final data.

The third stage, implementation, entails the following:

1. Carry out collection of the data according to your plan.

2. Analyze the information you have collected.

3. Organize the data to identify where your organization needs to improve and how much improvement is required.

4. Determine why your organization is not meeting the benchmark (i.e., lacking operation methods, equipment, materials, staff training and performance).

5. Conduct and then evaluate your research to ensure that it is objective and thorough.

The fourth phase, planning for change, requires you put together an improvement plan with set goals. The plan should pinpoint what needs to be done, who will do what, and when the work will be completed. Support from senior management will be required so you will need to put together a "sales" presentation to get authorization to move forward with your findings.

The fifth stage entails implementing the solution and monitoring the effort to ensure that the plan's goals are being met.

Finally, at the end of the program, it is time to evaluate the results. Measure the results and determine whether the goals set have been achieved. And give recognition to all the people who helped plan and carry out the project.

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For more information about benchmarking, check out AMA's management and leadership seminars at [www.amanet.org/seminars](http://www.amanet.org/seminars)



## The Enthusiasm Edge BY MARK VICKERS

Worker satisfaction has a major impact on the bottom line, suggests research behind the new book *The Enthusiastic Employee*. Although some managers may consider this common sense, others will be surprised. After all, for years management thinkers have debated the degree to which worker satisfaction pays off in organizational results.



The book's co-authors reportedly base their findings on over 30 years of research conducted by industrial organizational psychologists at Sirota Consulting. "In that time, we collected over 4 million survey responses from employees all around the world," write David Sirota, Louis A. Mischkind and Michael Irwin Meltzer.

They view employee attitudes as existing along a continuum from anger to neutrality to satisfaction and then at the highest level, enthusiasm. Why use the term "enthusiastic" rather than just "highly satisfied"? Because, they explain, something qualitatively different seems to be occurring at companies where many employees are highly satisfied: "On average, organizations with enthusiastic employees are much *higher performing* organizations than the rest."

### Impact on Work Quality

Sirota's research suggests that enthusiastic employees boost the quality of their work by up to 75%, as measured in terms of defect rates. Likewise, high customer sales and satisfaction rates are correlated with worker satisfaction.

So, what's the secret to generating high satisfaction in the workforce? Sirota and colleagues say it isn't so much what managers *should* do as it's what they *shouldn't* do.

They shouldn't squelch the enthusiasm with which the large majority of employees enter their new jobs. Most of what managers really need to do is

(1) treat employees fairly from a financial, safety and psychological viewpoint, (2) ensure that their work gives them a sense of achievement and pride, and (3) make sure there's a feeling of camaraderie in the workplace.

"A great company for employees," they write, "is one that largely meets all employees' needs for equity, achievement and camaraderie. Until that happens, it is no more than a 'good' company." In fact, satisfaction rises dramatically when all three needs are met, as opposed to just one or two of them.

### A Positive Perspective

The basic mistake managers tend to make is to create work policies that are geared toward that small minority (they estimate about 5%) that are basically "allergic" to work. Managers set up systems to keep close tabs on this 5% and punish them when they step out of line. "So people who come in wanting to work, and hoping to take pride in their work, find themselves treated as if they are children or criminals," Sirota has said. The idea of treating employees like adults and, more to the point, like trusted partners is a running theme in *The Enthusiastic Employee*. In this, it concurs with a study from the Families and Work Institute called the *National Study of the Changing Workforce*.

That study found that the ingredients of an "effective workplace" include manager support, co-worker support, job autonomy, learning opportunities and involvement in decision-making. It also found that companies with higher scores in these areas tend to score well in terms of worker engagement, satisfaction and retention.

Mark Vickers is editor for HR Institute, as well as senior research analyst. Copyright 2005, HR Institute ([www.hrinsstitute.info](http://www.hrinsstitute.info)).

## Getting Serious About Organizational Change

Based on discussions with consultants and business leaders, Keith Merron, president of the Avista Consulting Group Inc., offers this advice to corporate leaders the next time they contract with consultants. Merron suggests that a contract between a client and his or her consultant can actually inhibit change.

He explains that the consultant and client commit to a savior strategy. The consultant offers to help and the client needs help. Once the consultant leaves, however, the client too often is left with no more knowledge than he or she had before. Says Merron, "You can give people information; it's like giving them a bag of groceries. But knowledge transfers less easily. In the realm of human and organizational dynamics, deep knowledge must be learned and earned through exploration, shared thinking and often struggle."

Merron believes that consultants have to change their approach to keep clients from falling prey to the savior strategy. He suggests executives look for consultants who do the following:

**1. Inspire people through a clear case for change and a compelling image of the change itself.** This creates the conditions where the organization's leaders take responsibility for the change.

**2. Set clear and tangible goals for change.** People need to know exactly what is expected of them. With it, the organization can move in an aligned fashion. Without it, confusion reigns.

**3. Have a clear roadmap that describes how to get from where the organization is to where it wants to be.** The roadmap gives people confidence that the change is well thought out.

**4. Have the senior leadership team take ownership and active responsibility for the change.** No change occurs well when the senior leadership team is not pulling in the same direction.

**5. Enroll the organization in the vision and the practice of change.** While not everyone needs to be on board, a critical mass of people needs to be actively engaged.

Says Merron, "Successful efforts are driven by leadership within the organization."



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**Savoring the Possibilities of Life "Between Trapezes."** Author and executive coach Gail Blanke dares us to let go of the past and ask ourselves, "How good could it be?" Because the real "juice" of life, says Blanke, in this insightful interview, can be found in that scary space "between trapezes."

**Increasing Your Earning Potential.** Management guru Brian Tracy has some advice for every working person: "If you want to earn more, you've got to learn more." No matter what your field, to stay on top of your world, you must continually add to your knowledge and your ability.

**LEADERSHIP**

**Does a Leader Have to Be Paranoid to Be**

**Successful?** Two generations, two perspectives. Sander A. Flaum makes a case for "healthy paranoia." Son Jonathon looks to the East for inspiration.

**MANAGEMENT**

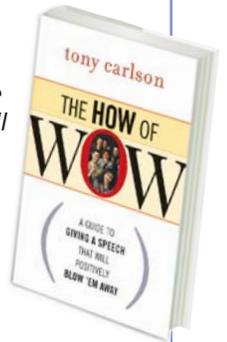
**Multicultural Communication Tips.** For managers of culturally diverse teams—here are some sure-fire strategies to help you get your message across, without putting your foot in your mouth.

**SALES & MARKETING**

**The ABCs of Advertising Online.** Now that practically everyone's surfing the Net, savvy companies are moving some of their ad dollars online. Here's a primer on how to navigate the world of pop-ups and banner ads.

**Book of the Month:**

*The How of Wow—A Guide to Giving a Speech That Will Positively Blow 'em Away*, by Tony Carlson (AMACOM 2005). Author Carlson shares the sad truth about public speaking: "Every working day in North America, more than 10,000 people get up on their hind legs and deliver speeches. Twenty-five minutes later, 9,998 are forgotten by everyone except perhaps the speech giver, the writer and the speech giver's subordinates." Learn how you can increase the shelf life of your next speech.



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**OCTOBER 5, NEW YORK • Coaching Secrets That Top Executives Depend On.** Learn tips from a panel of coaches that will help you master learning and behavioral changes to leverage your position in the workplace. AMA Members \$25, Nonmembers \$50.

**OCTOBER 14, CHICAGO • 4th Annual China Forum: Doing Business in Today's China**—Intelligence professionals share insights. AMA Members \$1,195, Nonmembers \$1,395.

**OCTOBER 18, TOKYO, JAPAN • Brand Sense Symposium with Martin Lindstrom.** Results from a two-year study indicate the future of branding relies on integrating all five senses in your brand and marketing approach.

**OCTOBER 20-21, LAS VEGAS • Sales Leadership 2005**—A timely executive-to-executive exchange of ideas on how to use leadership to inspire your sales force to peak performance levels. Caesars Palace. AMA Members \$1,695, Nonmembers \$1,895.

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