



MEASURES TO STOP THE ROT

How do you recognise and deal with a bad apple?
Nicola Davies looks at how to keep a team together

Most professionals have experienced a 'bad apple' in the team, someone who fails to pull their weight, is aggressive or bullying, frequently pessimistic and violates team norms.

Not to be mistaken for the creative or unconventional thinker, the bad apple has a much more devastating effect on a team, causing extensive disharmony.

Failing to make enough effort can cause feelings of inequality among other team members, while frequent negativity can lead to poor team morale. Violations of team norms undermine trust.

Team disharmony

As trust weakens, so does the positive team culture, with members physically and psychologically disengaging. This harms the team, its individual members and the team's outcomes. In nursing, team outcomes include patient care and the consequences of a bad apple can be serious.

Given the devastating consequences of a bad apple, being able to identify one can prevent the entire barrel being spoiled (see box). In terms of coping, team members can react in one of three ways:

- ▶ Motivational intervention: members express concerns

and ask the person to change.

- ▶ Rejection: removal of the bad apple.
- ▶ Defence: this can include denial, social withdrawal, anger and anxiety.

Attempting to motivate the negative person is usually the most successful strategy, while defence tends to be a destructive method of coping.

IDENTIFYING A BAD APPLE

Type of bad apple	Characteristics
Negative employee	Rarely smiles Makes negative remarks Resists new procedures Frequently complains Predicts failure Disagreeable and blameful Sees challenges as obstacles
Underperformer	Lacks desire Does the bare minimum Acts busy when not Chooses unnecessary tasks over critical tasks Leaves least favourite tasks for others Inflexible
Conflict creator	No sense of urgency Thrives on conflict Leaves others feeling anxious, angry, intimidated, resentful and poorly motivated Intensifies problems Challenges decisions Makes accusations Territorial

Other coping techniques you may wish to consider include:

- ▶ Informing your manager before the problem gets out of hand. Managers should speak to the individual privately.
- ▶ When challenging a bad apple, starting with a positive statement to avoid evoking immediate defensiveness.
- ▶ Determining any underlying causes for the person's negativity, such as a need for training or a mentor, or other forms of support.
- ▶ Using staff appraisals to monitor team dynamics.

Keep the positive aspects of the team in sight. Other members need to continue to praise each other's efforts in an attempt to strengthen those areas that are being overshadowed by a negative team member.

Ideally, a bad apple will be identified before they are employed. Indeed, managers need to take special care when recruiting staff or forming teams. This might include pre-recruitment tests to screen out individuals who are less agreeable or conscientious.

If negative individuals emerge in an established team, allocating them with independent work can be a solution. In any event, the effectiveness of the team and its members is the priority **NS**

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