

Don't listen to a thing the boss tells you. The boss doesn't know anything. You gotta do this

Eliminating 'Team Busters'

BY BILL HOOPES

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT COLLINS
MCOLLINS@WEBQUILL.COM

*before they
affect your crew*

It's a mid-summer Monday morning in Grassville. You've just completed your regular, small company team meeting, made assignments and recognized top performers.

At this week's meeting, you tried to emphasize your belief that if your company doesn't deliver better customer service than the competition, your business will

suffer. You talked about checking with homeowners every chance you get to identify any problems that may need attention. You talked about "doing the job right the first time" to avoid unnecessary service calls.

A quick survey of the crew's faces signaled that they got the message.

After the session, you watch over the day's start,



making sure the crew is organized and on the road, then turn your attention toward repairing an important spray rig. In the middle of the job and missing some parts, it's clear you'll have to pick up some supplies to finish.

As you head for the store, you notice two of your vehicles at

a McDonald's restaurant. That's strange, you think to yourself. I provided plenty of coffee and doughnuts to the guys only 20 minutes earlier. Why are some of my guys at McDonald's?

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Since you can't find a logical reason for their presence, you pull in and enter the restaurant through a side door.

Two of your people are sitting behind a row of plants. One is a new employee, and the other is a veteran.

You slide into a hidden seat opposite the row of plants.

As you listen to their conversation, you witness the attitude of an all-too-common employee you know as the "Team Buster," or "TB." These insidious, negative employees create divisiveness and negative attitudes that can destroy a team's morale, productivity and loyalty, leading to increased turnover.

As the conversation progresses, you find it hard to stay cool. Tom, your six-year veteran, is lecturing Anthony, your new employee. Tom details his extensive experience working with customers. He tells Anthony that "what you heard in the meeting is the typical manager's 'take' on customer service."

With a superior sneer, Tom outlines what he calls "the real world" and lets Anthony know in plain terms that "what he told us to do is what all bosses try to get employees to do."

You steam up more as you hear, "These owners don't do what we do, kid. In fact, most of them haven't touched a spreader for so long, they wouldn't know what to do with one."

The lecture continues, "If you want to know how to get the job done, here's what you do."

Then, Tom proceeds to undo all the instructions and training you just gave to Anthony.

In no time, your new employee has been indoctrinated by the TB. He now thinks that "knocking on the door wastes your time" because "nobody's home anyhow." He learned how to write comments on invoices in advance because "doing it on the lawn takes too much time."

Anthony has also been carefully instructed on how to answer the typical questions "those stupid customers ask" and why "all you really need to do is blow a little smoke at them and get outta there." Tom even told Anthony when, where and how to relieve himself in the bushes.

Tom then begins to describe how to observe female sunbathers in his territory who "really make the job fun in the summer."

That's when the game ends.

Damage control

You've had it. You get up, approach the startled workers and say: _____. What do you say? What action would you take? Can the damage be repaired? How long had this been going on?

"Team Busters" are negative people who will poison your team if left in existence. These people will tear down your team's morale and your operation will suffer.

Positive steps

Start by setting positive standards. You have the right to run your business any way you choose and that privilege in-

cludes establishing customer service attitudes, as well as procedures. Your staff has a responsibility to meet your standards.

React immediately! Don't just hope a negative person will 'see the light' and change once things get less hectic.

Be certain you have clearly communicated your standards and expectations. Under difficult circumstances, even the most committed of us fail to live up to our own standards. Before you blame and take action, check out the effectiveness of your communications.

If you're convinced the employee knew how the job was to be done, conduct an immediate and private performance intervention interview.

In the interview, review the training you have provided and the instructions you have given. Get the employee to acknowledge that he or she understood your job performance standards.

Now, communicate the specific performance problem in detail. Be specific, detailed and unemotional. Confine comments to specific performance. Do not attempt to analyze why the performance was unacceptable, just describe what actually happened.

Ask the employee to explain his or her performance. Listen with an open mind. Do not jump to conclusions or "bait" the employee to prove your point.

Most managers believe the employee deserves at least one verbal and one written warning. Depending on the severity of the unacceptable performance, you

may decide to terminate the employee on the spot. If you decide to warn the employee, give the *specific and detailed instructions* on the level of performance you expect in the future, beginning immediately.

Establish follow-up performance benchmarks and a timetable for improvement. Always follow-up quickly.

The worst thing any manager can do is *nothing*.

Keeping TBs off the team

Once stung, most managers either develop the opinion that "people just don't want to follow directions," or they learn to keep a closer ear to the ground.

Here are two things you can do to minimize the chance that a "TB" will invade your staff:

Require staff input as a part of the planning and problem-solving process. People are positively motivated and work harder to succeed when they feel ownership in the process.

Hold regular "one-on-one" meetings with your staff. Make them frequent, private and personal. Ask questions that probe the employee's mind. Learn as much as possible about their overall level of satisfaction or frustrations. Be bold enough to ask your employees straight out, "How can I make your job a little bit easier?" Once they know you genuinely care, they'll care too.

— The author is director of training and development at Scotts' Lawn Service, Marysville, OH. He can be reached at 937/644-7207.