



Being Too Nice in the Workplace

How can someone possibly be too nice at work? What does it look like and why is it a problem?

Example:

You work with another person who is not pulling their weight at work. They appear lazy and seem to do as little as possible to get by. It almost feels that they are taking advantage of the corporate benefits and system. It has become a problem because it is impacting your workload and stressing the overall performance of the team. However, you don't want to talk to the co-worker about it because you are "only a peer" (or manager) and you have seen that they get very defensive when they have been called on their stuff in the past. So rather than doing the right and good thing by speaking with them about their help, you either go over their head to the supervisor or complain to someone else. The word gets back to the individual you should have talked to and now there is larger wedge between you and them.

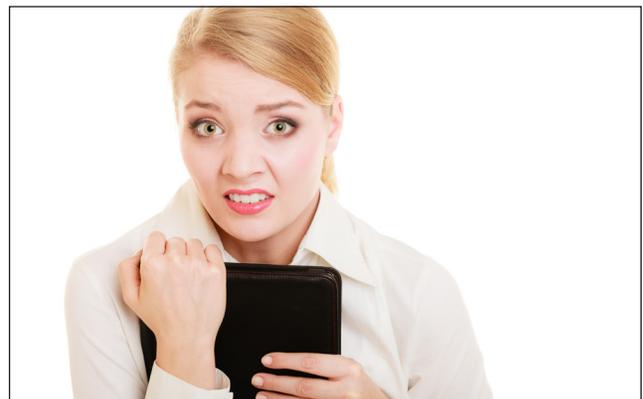
The Problem:

You were too nice! Because of the discomfort of dealing with their reaction, you chose to take the path of least resistance by going over their head, and became the staff informant by running to your supervisor.

Don't misunderstand me here. Being nice engenders respect and is a characteristic of being professional.

The over-the-top niceness that I'm referring to, however, has undertones of people-pleasing laced with fear of conflict or making anyone uncomfortable.

I have a good friend that authored a book called "No More Christian Nice Guy" (Bethany House Publishing, 2005. Author, Paul Coughlin) and he makes a distinction between being nice and good. "Goodness," he states, "is willing to enter into conflict in order to find healthy resolutions to better the organization, themselves, and those they work with. Overly nice workers, in contrast, do not speak up when they should. Thus they carry a lot of turmoil, lose respect from others, and deny the needed information to improve performance."



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Below I have listed symptoms or expressions of niceness to be aware of:

“Too Nice” Behaviors

- Allowing problematic behaviors to continue without saying or doing anything.
- Being fearful to speak up because the person that needs to be talked to is good at what they do and you don't want to lose them.
- Allowing an abusive co-worker or boss to continue to be the office bully and only complaining about it.
- Acting one way on the outside (calm and kind) and feeling total turmoil and resentment on the inside.
- Having a difficult time saying no or disagreeing when you know you're right.



Of all the problems that I observe in the workplace, the one that has climbed to the top above personality differences, gossip, facing changes, or rebuilding trust are the passive employees or supervisors who refuse to pull the trigger or to have the uncomfortable discussion with another for fear of making them mad or hurt if they speak up.

Of course, the problem with this is that it creates larger problems. I've stated in a former newsletter entitled “The Elephant in the Room” that if the

elephant issue that everyone is afraid to address is not confronted and moved out of the room, then the elephant starts having baby elephants and there are more problems waiting to grow.

There is a variety of rippling affects organizationally and in our personal lives if we don't learn to move from nice to good in our relationships at work.

Some Complications from Being too Nice

1. If you are in leadership, especially, you will begin to lose respect from staff! Like it or not, should you be in a managerial position, your team is looking to you to face problems squarely and maturely. To allow them to continue with no change, will eventually result in a tremendous loss of confidence from others.
2. You eventually will start to resent the very people that you are afraid to talk with because they will just continue with their behavior and it will continue to eat at you.
3. You may find yourself looking for another job, which is not even necessary. If you quit a job for being too nice, then you will take your nice self with you to another office and the cycle will begin all over again and you might regret leaving the last place.
4. The main complication, however, is that you are neither being nice or good to yourself. There is a sense of courage and joy that is restored when you know you are doing the right thing and address a long-standing problem!

Going from Nice to Good

I have found out the hard way that there is no switch to flick that makes us go from nice to good overnight. It takes awareness, self- respect, practice, and—above all—courage to learn how to negotiate uncomfortable discussions and situations.

Being Too Nice in the Workplace

Below I've listed some starter ideas to be aware of:

- Be aware that your niceness is more about fearing conflict than hurting someone's feelings.
- Be aware that your effectiveness at work will exponentially grow because people will know where you stand and will applaud you for speaking up.
- Be aware of and read any good book on "Boundaries" (Psychologists and Authors, Cloud and Townsend) or spend time with someone who you respect that has found the balance between being nice and good.
- Be aware of the problematic behavior or the elephant in the room that others have been pointing out and do something—anything—other than avoiding it.

Below is a brief self-reflection and analysis to determine if you're nice rather than good. Answer the statements honestly to gauge your level of niceness:

The "Being too Nice" Checklist

(Check the areas needing attention)

1. Do you feel taken advantage of by others at work?
Do others have an expectation that you will bail them out or do their work for them?
2. Are others starting to say or hint that you allow people to walk all over you?

3. When you run into a bully at work and report it to a supervisor, are you taken seriously?
4. Do you hesitate pointing out a problem to others that is potentially reducing the efficiency of the entire staff?

If you checked any of these and/or find yourself or staff consistently being too nice, consider scheduling a phone consultation or the training through TeamWorks entitled "Professional Boundaries in the Workplace" or "Blowing up, Speaking up, or Clamming up in the Workplace."



Bill Gallagher has been counseling and working with professionals since 1980. His emphasis in the workplace is to help develop both relational skills and professional standards among administration and staff. He has worked in multiple organizational settings and of recent has spent most of his time addressing workplace issues in healthcare and city government.

Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.