

Resolving Workplace Problems

Introduction: Every job presents chances to learn and problems to overcome. The following situations will give you practice in learning how to overcome some problems you may encounter in the workplace.

Directions: Review the case studies and answer the questions.

Case Studies:

Commitment. Many complaints have been made to the department store manager about the poor service rendered by sales associates. Most of the complaints centered around service during the hour between noon and 1:00 pm. Experienced associates get their choice of lunch hours and most of them go to lunch between noon and 1:00 pm. This leaves the newer, inexperienced associates to handle the customers during the noon hour. Customer traffic is particularly heavy during this time, so the manager has requested all associates to be on the floor during this hour each day.

Lunch breaks can now be taken only between 11:00-12:00 noon and 1:00-2:00 pm. Barbara has been taking her lunch hour at noon since she began working in the store six years ago. Since she usually has lunch with a friend, Barbara has continued leaving at noon. The manager noticed this and has warned her that if it occurs again her services will no longer be needed. Barbara, thinking she has "earned" the right to a noon lunch hour, feels the manager is being unfair. Does Barbara have a right to continue taking a noon lunch hour? Why or why not?

How could this disagreement have been avoided? Since the disagreement did occur, what can be done to resolve it?

Honesty. Janet, 19, was recently hired as a bookkeeper for a local service station and Mr. Jones, her employer, decided to test her honesty. He placed 35 cents extra in the cash register to see what she would do about it. Janet decided to keep the 35 cents for herself because it was "over." She knew that she should record it in the "cash short and over" ledger, but she was dishonest. Her employer fired her. He told her that if she would take a small amount now that she might take a large amount later.

Do you think Janet was dishonest? Do you think Janet's employer was justified in firing her? Why or why not?

Timeliness. Linda and Lisa are secretaries in a large corporation. Linda always arrives at work 10 to 15 minutes late and then goes to the ladies room to put on her make-up. She finally gets to her desk about 8:30 am. Lisa always arrives at her desk promptly at 8:00 am and begins her work. Even though Linda has better secretarial skills than Lisa, Lisa got a raise when it came time for salary review and Linda didn't.

Do you think Linda's employer has a right to hold back her raise for being late? If you were Linda, what would you do to improve your chances of getting a raise next time?

Initiative. Mary, age 17, is a waitress at a bus stop restaurant. When the buses are in all the servers are busy waiting on customers; but, after the buses leave, most of the wait staff sit down to drink a coke, eat, or just relax. Mary never sits down on duty. She keeps busy cutting up lemons for tea or filling napkin holders and salt and pepper shakers. She always sees what needs to be done and does it! The restaurant manager noticed her initiative and gave her a \$2 per shift raise.

If you were Mary's boss, would you have given her the raise? Why or why not?

Do you believe that time seems to pass faster when you are busy?

Initiative is not always rewarded with an immediate pay raise. If extra efforts did not result in a pay raise, would it still be worth the effort? Why or why not?

Willingness to Learn. Kerry is a copy clerk for a large employment agency. The large volume of copying necessitates a frequent change of toner in the copy machine. She doesn't want to learn how to change the toner because she's afraid she'll get the toner on her hands and clothes. She is always asking one of the other employees in the office to change the toner, which they are beginning to resent.

How could Kerry benefit by learning to change the toner for herself?

If you were an employer, what would you do about an employee who was not willing to learn?

Attitude. John, 20, works at Graham's Garage. He is unusually slow in performing brake jobs for customers. When his supervisor tries to show him how he could do it faster, he refuses to listen. He says that his way is the best even though it is slower. John has shown a similar attitude about other jobs around the garage, always insisting on doing things his way - whether his way is best or not. His supervisor fired him because of his poor attitude and unwillingness to learn.

Could John's supervisor have done anything to make John a more productive worker? What would you have done if you were his supervisor?

Willingness to Follow Directions. Susan, 18, is a statistical typist for a local accounting firm. Her employer gives her directions on how to type the charts for each job. Sometimes Susan changes the format slightly, thinking her way is better, only to have the work returned to be redone. After spending two days correcting a number of charts, her employer warned her that if she failed to follow directions again, she would be fired.

Suppose that Susan's way is the better way? Should she still do it her employer's way? Why or why not?

Dependability. The Home Improvement Center hired Arnold part-time to stack lumber, make deliveries, and assist wherever needed. His duties for a particular day are not usually known in advance, but he is given direction each afternoon when he reports for work. He stacked lumber last Tuesday. When he finished the job early in the afternoon, his boss told him to go home early as everything was caught up. Arnold didn't show up for work at all on Wednesday. When he came in on Thursday, the boss fired Arnold. The Center made a lot of sales on Wednesday morning to be delivered that afternoon. When Arnold didn't show up or call in, the manager hired another boy to make the deliveries.

Was the manager unfair to Arnold?

Suppose that Arnold was ill on Wednesday. What could he have done to save his job?

Enthusiasm. Maggie, 18, a recent graduate, has obtained her first job-- as a receptionist in a savings and loan. She is extremely enthusiastic about the job and smiles at everyone who comes into the bank. She's so friendly that many people stop to chat with her. She looks forward to going to work every morning and is sorry when her work day is over. Maggie can hardly wait to get home each night to tell her family and friends about the interesting and exciting things that happened to her at work.

Do you think Maggie's enthusiasm will help make her a good worker? Could her enthusiasm be a problem? Why or why not?

Acceptance Of Criticism. Jack is a checker in a grocery store. He is a good worker, very dependable, never late for work. However, he makes frequent mistakes ringing up sales because he scans groceries so fast they don't always scan properly. The manager is weary of seeing Jack's notes regarding errors, so he decided to speak to Jack about it. He suggested that Jack slow down a little and become more accurate. Jack became very upset and quit his job because he could not accept constructive criticism.

If you were Jack, what would you have done?

Loyalty. "I don't like working for Mr. Jones," said Joan to her friend, Lynn, one day at lunch. I'd rather work for Mr. Baxter; at least he takes interesting cases." A lady at the next table overheard their conversation and, since she is a friend of Mr. Jones' wife, could hardly wait to tell her what she had heard. Mrs. Jones promptly told her husband, and the office atmosphere suddenly became very strained.

Who was the cause of the unpleasant office atmosphere? Why?

If you don't like your job, who can you complain to? If you find that you simply have to complain to everyone you know about your job, what should you do?