



## WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

### Dealing with office 'divas'

by Joseph Godwin

We all have seen the detrimental effect on office morale and performance that can be caused by an uncontrollable diva, and managing diva personalities can seem overwhelming.

In the office, "divas," or "prima donnas," are self-centered, often arrogant people who believe they are always right and find it difficult to work with others. They are often surrounded by self-created drama and create performance and morale issues throughout the office. Divas are difficult to manage, difficult to work with, and extremely stressful to work for.

If you are the decision maker, the wise course is not to hire divas in the first place. They are rarely, if ever, worth the effort it takes to manage them or the disruption they cause in the workplace. Sometimes you must find ways to deal with the different types of divas (remember that the term "diva" applies to both males and females in the office).

#### *The 'enabled' diva*

If employees are excellent in work performance, management is often inclined to tolerate some eccentricities. As managers continue to allow these individuals to ignore policies, berate coworkers, and demand exceptions, the worse their diva behavior becomes. At some point, management may say, "Enough is enough," but they may find it difficult to be firm because the diva may also be, for example, their top sales representative.

Enabled divas may have "high connections" or be viewed by management as having a lot of potential. Dealing with enabled divas requires giving them firm directions on what is needed and expected but also giving them enough space to complete those tasks so they don't feel as though they are being micromanaged.

When diva employees perform well, give them recognition that is deserved, reinforcing desirable behavior. When complimenting divas, be specific about what was done well. It may be as simple as having given clear and firm directions to their team or inspiring their team to think more creatively, resulting in brilliant teamwork. As a manager, try to point out and reward cooperative behavior. Sometimes it's a matter of poor interpersonal skills, which can be addressed

by allowing divas to use their skills and abilities in an individual contributor capacity rather than as part of a work group.

#### *The drama queen or king*

These employees are unwilling to receive constructive criticism, amplify real problems, and create problems where none exist. They love attention, are resistant to anyone else's ideas, and often insist on "my way." When a project goes bad, they will explode if they think it reflects badly on them.

The drama queens and kings require a "firm hand." Tasks and deliverables should be clear and unambiguous, with minimum opportunity for miscommunication. Anticipate that drama queens or kings will complain about any assignment that isn't entirely clear and will blame their coworkers for any deficiencies. Taking proactive steps to avoid that reaction is helpful.

Drama queens and kings aren't interested that others may be insulted or offended by their actions. They rationalize that those people are too sensitive for the work environment and that they're just doing their job the best way they can. Managers should address the problem, but don't expect the divas to have any awakening of sensitivity toward others.

Despite your managerial efforts to handle the divas productively, sometimes it's all personality and no work involved. You witness back-stabbing, workplace bullying, and a sharp decrease in morale. If you have authority to make a change, then do so, either by reassignment or termination of employment. If you don't have the authority to alter the divas' employment, you should try to stay out of the drama and do your work in the most professional manner possible. Set clear boundaries, and keep focused on work. Be assertive and professional.

Work can be stressful enough. The sooner you learn to deal with divas, the more productive you and your work environment can become.



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