

# NEGATIVITY

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*in the Comm Center*

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**12 'BREAKING OUT' EXERCISES!**

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# Unit One

## Understanding a Negative Comm Center Atmosphere

### “IT’S LIKE THIS DARK EMOTION”

It’s been over fifteen years but I still remember his words, they hit me like a baseball bat to the forehead,

*“You confuse me, you seem to agree with me and then I hear different. You are agreeable to my face, but then word gets back to me that you have a problem with what we talked about.”*

I stood motionless in his office — probably with my mouth gasping for words. He had been our Director for a year now. I had been a Supervisor for two years before he showed up. I wouldn’t say he was popular — he had never worked in communications — he was a street Sergeant who saw an opportunity to get off the street. But, still he was my superior and I didn’t like his opinion of me. He wasn’t wrong — but I didn’t like it. It affected me because I wasn’t aware of what I was doing until that moment. And I didn’t like it one bit — it wasn’t how I wanted to be. What had happened to bring out this side of me?

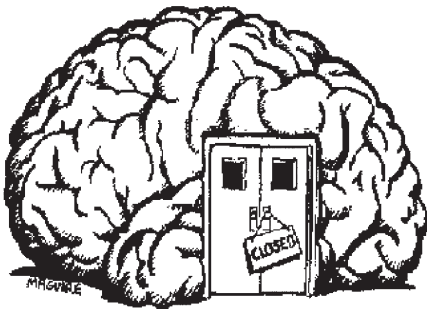
This week I sat in jury duty, next to two young women. Both were probably 25ish, one mentioned she worked for corrections, the other for Boeing. One talked more than the other but they had one thing in common. They complained. They complained a lot. They complained about jury duty, and their jobs, and their husbands. They talked about someone they both knew, in negative terms. They didn’t miss a beat, seemed to enjoy their negativity. Was it habit? Is this what we mean by negativity — or is it more or different in Emergency Communications?

### Negativists at Work

Most of us have been negative at work. Most of us did not like to be that way. For some people it’s a sport; others, a way of being. Some people seem to flourish in a negative atmosphere. Often people defend their right to be nasty as their legitimate duty. Does Emergency Communications have an overabundance of negativists? If you study why a person becomes a life long card carrying cynic, you will understand. If we don’t have a disproportionate number of them, we should have. More about that later.

Most of us don’t like being around a negative person yet at times mutely fall into step behind them. We seem to be so affected by them that they can drag one person or even an agency down. Those who are especially affected are people who don’t understand their own power to control their own moods. Negativists can be at the center of dysfunction in the workplace. Yet if you were to ask the negativist, they would probably tell





you that they are the victims and only put forth their best effort — and more. They feel unappreciated, disappointed and generally justified in their feelings and how they express them.

Here are some traits you can recognize:

- ..depressive look, rarely smiling.
- ..good at many things and know it.
- ..inability to accept any new idea as workable.
- ..little trust for those in control.
- ..harsh words for anyone opposing them.
- ..cynical attitude but heart of gold.
- ..fearful and critical of change.
- ..display a helpless attitude at times.
- ..use the same negative phrases repeatedly.
- ..wet blanket at anyone's success.
- ..gloomy outlook on life.
- ..critical of those around them.
- ..resistant to improving their attitude.
- ..pessimistic about the future.
- ..sour in look and dealings.
- ..weak, no energy, not willing to put forth extra effort.
- ..dogmatic in opinions.
- ..unwilling to change or look at new ideas.
- ..unwilling to look at their own ability to learn.
- ..feelings that this is the way they are — forever.

You will hear from a negative person some or all of the following:

*"We tried that.*

*There's no sense wasting our time.*

*It'll never work.*

*THEY don't care about us.*

*What's the use?*

*I'm the queen of bad attitude. I like my bad attitude."*

A negativist will complain about anything new and anyone who achieves anything. What is going on?

*"Scratch the surface of a cynic and you will find a disappointed idealist."*

What NEED is being fulfilled by their behavior? Does complaining give us pleasure, does it alleviate some pain, or is it habit? Complaining is part of a negative attitude, but there is more. Negativism is a way of internal reasoning that says *"I won't agree, cooperate or trust until the world apologizes."* A workplace negativist uses a lot of energy just wrestling with the feelings that direct their actions and affect their attitude. Their peers waste energy either by avoiding, joining or disliking them. **The difference between normal complaining and destructive critical behavior should be recognized.**

Occasionally, all of us feel a defeatist attitude. Fortunately, most of us bounce back because we don't like to feel that way and we understand that 'you can't win 'em all.' Losing doesn't take away our entire being. However, a negativist can not 'let it go.'

Occasionally, all of us feel embittered about wrong bestowed upon us by others — but we forgive and forget. We understand that the ability to forgive is important to our own health and well being. A negativist won't forgive because they feel others need to earn or deserve forgiveness, or the wrong they suffered had a significant personal and internal loss attached.

Occasionally, we are all disappointed because we had expected more out of something or someone — but we get over it. Our spirit may be dampened, but not damaged. We can dry off. A negativist does not understand or practice the art of moving within, expressing, letting go and moving on from disappointment. They carry resentment on their backs like a sack of dead fish, proclaiming, "*Something around here stinks.*"

Occasionally, we all feel unappreciated — but we find ways to get support. Like drawing water from a well, most of us can self talk ourselves into remembering that true appreciation comes from within and say, "Who cares, I know I'm wonderful." A negativist isn't so sure that they are wonderful, don't have a well and instead must draw only from what others can give them. If they aren't constantly filled up, they feel empty.

Imagine feeling defeated, embittered, disappointed and unappreciated — but not having the ability to let it go. A negativist believes they are defeated, because they tried and did not succeed and it hurt. They expect defeat so prepare for battle. This attitude becomes habitual, and it becomes difficult to change. People begin to expect nasty from them and may even joke about it. Soon it begins to appear as if this spoiler attitude serves some useful purpose. But it does not. An unyielding, defiant, resistant employee can drain *creativity and joy out of any situation.*



## **"5" Workable Things you can do**

1. **Honesty.** The negativist first needs to understand how their attitude affects others. Tell them without regard as to 'how they will take it.' They want acceptance like us all and may be willing to understand. Use "I" statements. Be sure to NOT use "you are" or blame in any part of your message. "*I feel sad by negative talk about Mary.*"
2. **Value.** The negativist needs to feel appreciated, and **do** have great qualities. Look for ways to stroke the person. Also try to identify what ways this person has been de-valued in the past so you can begin to understand. Being understood can help a person release old pent up emotions.
3. **Success.** The negativist may be difficult to convince, but they need some success in a new project. Give them something positive to do