

Responding to Passive-Aggressive Workplace Behavior

This material about passive-aggressive workplace behavior, while addressed to department chairs, has relevance to faculty colleagues as well. The following two references and links offer more detail.

R. Kent Crookston, *The Department Chair: A resource for Academic Administrators*, Summer 2012, Vol. 23, No. 1, and book *Working with Problem Faculty*, Jossey-Bass, 2012.

<http://www.departmentchairs.org/Sample-Article/working-with-the-passive-aggressive-colleague.aspx>

Tomorrow's Professor, Message #822: from Chapter 11, *Coping with the Passive-Aggressive Faculty Member*, in Jeffrey L. Buller, & Mary Baldwin College, *The Essential Department Chair: A Practical Guide to College Administration*, Anker Publishing Company, 2006.

<http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/tomprof/posting.php?ID=822>

Some brief points:

- Passive-aggressive actions, verbal and nonverbal, are an indirect outlet of a person's frustration, upset, anger. They are often expressed as blaming others and procrastination.
- Assertive actions, verbal and nonverbal, demonstrate a person's confidence and ability to share opinions, thoughts and feelings with respect for the other person(s).
- University workplace environments and interactions can be both freeing and stifling in the expression of a range of emotions.
- A helpful mindset for responding to passive-aggressive expressions is to take it as an opportunity to discuss frustrations and discontent.

Several possible responses are offered by the authors noted above. Please read their materials for further explanation.

- Clarify values and expectations.
- Set specific performance goals and specific timetables for completion.
- Follow policy.
- Build trust.
- Build in, where possible, some choice and flexibility on work assignments.
- Hold colleague accountable for results.
- Evaluate yourself and your perceptions.
- Listen: Reflect more. Reflex less. (Jean Civikly-Powell)
- Build in regularly scheduled progress reports on work assignments.
- Acknowledge improvements and work done well with a sincere compliment, and bring counterproductive behavior to the conversation, as needed.
- Be persistent and consistent.
- Do not engage in power struggles or arguments, or allow diversions from stated goals.
- Examine complaints of unfairness.

Key phrases for online searches for additional information:

- workplace negativity, workplace gossip
- the cost of conflict
- workplace conflict resolution
- workplace climate
- healthy workplace culture
- appreciative inquiry in the workplace

“Right now, my life is just one learning experience after another. By the end of the week, I should be a genius.” – Jeanette Osias