



## Nailed!

Knock out unhelpful patterns of workplace behaviour

**WORK WITH ENOUGH TEAMS** and eventually you'll spot certain anti-patterns — undesirable behaviour that manifests over and over again. But don't just chalk this behaviour up to workplace culture. Whether you are a manager or an employee, you can drastically improve the circumstances. Check out these six common examples.

### Cookie licking

**What is it?** Staking a claim to something to prevent others from getting in on the action and then doing little or nothing about it. No one else but you, for instance, would dream of eating a cookie that you've just licked.

**Workplace scenario:** you eye a plum project and take on the assignment before anyone else. But you display more joy about getting the project out of others' hands than actually completing the assignment with vigour or completing it at all. So the file sits on your desk and your coworkers resent that they don't have a chance to work on such a great assignment. Put another way, it's "I don't know what to do, but I don't want anyone else to do it."

**Stamp out this behaviour by:** setting up a system to ensure other people can collaborate. Managers can do this by acknowledging the person who is the first to volunteer but then opening up projects to the rest of the team. If the cookie licker already has the project, check the status regularly, says Merge Gupta-Sunderji, a leadership and workplace communication

expert at Calgary-based mergespeaks Inc. "Find out how far along he has progressed with things and ask if he has the resources he needs. If he fails to deliver, then you have something to hold him accountable to."

### Mushroom management

**What is it?** Leaving people in the dark about events of interest. If they ask you about the events, you spin some corporate manure that means absolutely nothing.

**Workplace scenario:** a company merger is the talk around the water-cooler, but "no comment" is the response from the corporate brass. Meanwhile, employees are speculating about everything from massive layoffs to a company relocation.

**Stamp out this behaviour by:** telling staff what you know, even if you don't know much, says Gupta-Sunderji.

"It's better to feed the mill instead of letting it spiral out of control," she explains. "Do you want your employees circulating the worse possible scenarios or a rumour mill that has some semblance of truth?" Even something such as "the information hasn't yet been finalized, we'll let you know when it is" lets staff know it has been heard.

### Credit grabbers

**What is it?** Need we bother explaining? The title says it all.

**Workplace scenario:** you're in a team meeting where your manager or coworker congratulates herself on a job well done for a project. She neglects to mention the fact that you also toiled for hours on key strategy and speechwriting.

**Stamp out this behaviour by:** speaking up. During the meeting, you could interject subtly by saying, "We debated the pros and cons of taking this approach." In the case of a boss as the credit grabber, workplace expert Barbara Moses suggests taking her aside. "Say you were hurt that no credence was given to your role and how can we correct that impression," says Moses, president of Toronto-based BBM Human Resource Consultants Inc.

If managers have credit grabbers on their team, Gupta-Sunderji recommends acknowledging them but also others to avoid demoralization. "In a group meeting, you could say, 'Great work, Peter. I know you were pivotal in making it happen. What other team members participated in this project?'" she says.

### Hammerhead

**What is it?** Treating all employees and situations in the same manner regardless of individual circumstances.

**Workplace scenario:** your daytime

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employees work the same hours, no negotiation whatsoever. The father who proposes to start work earlier so he can pick up his kids from daycare? Against the rules. Everyone else leaves at a specific time, so should he.

**Stamp out this behaviour by:** treating people with equivalence. It's impossible to treat every employee equally because everyone brings something different to the table, notes Gupta-Sunderji. "Some managers believe rules are in place for a reason. But I say rules are there for you to exercise judgment and you were put in that position to exercise good judgment," she says.

Also recognize that people are motivated by different things, depending on personality and background, Moses adds. "If you have an introverted staffer, he or she will not see a team-building party as being very rewarding," she says. "If you only communicate by email to an extroverted staffer, that staffer will feel demotivated."

### Analysis paralysis

**What is it?** Thinking too much and not acting on decisions.

**Workplace scenario:** you dive enthusiastically into your project but remain buried in the nitty-gritty details.

What step should you take next? What would happen if you took that approach instead of this approach? **Stamp out this behaviour by:** setting a deadline. "Those with analysis paralysis are focused on getting things right," notes Moses. "But the good news is they tend to be very good with deadlines. So ask them to make a recommendation within a certain time period because it forces them to think about the resolution, not 'Here's the data I found' but 'Here's the course of action I recommend.'"

### Groupthink

**What is it?** Going along with whatever the team decides without voicing what you think is a better course of action.

**Workplace scenario:** your boss has an idea of how to generate more revenue but you truly believe his approach will alienate key stakeholders. No one else has opposed his idea and you're afraid of being ostracized for not agreeing. Aren't opposing views seen as negative and going against the grain of teamwork? How can I earn my bonus if my boss sees me as the contrarian? **Stamp out this behaviour by:** giving everyone a chance to speak. Managers can withhold their opinion until the end of the meeting. That way, there's no pressure for staff to conform to one set viewpoint and people can debate the issues freely, says Steven Appelbaum, professor of management at Concordia University's John Molson School of Business.

He notes that research shows leaving things up to just a few people without healthy debate generally results in the wrong decision. Take what happened to the US Space Shuttle Challenger back in 1986, he points out. The engineers had safety concerns, but management wanted to proceed so the engineers cowed to the pressure to launch.

— Deanne Gage