The Drama-Free Office: A Guide to Healthy Collaboration with Your Team, Coworkers, and Boss

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Nearly everyone who's worked in an office—or any workplace, really—is likely to have encountered a colleague who makes the job more challenging than it needs to be.

In their insightful guide to navigating professional relationships, Jim Warner and Kaley Klemp identify the four main types who contribute to a toxic environment: the chronic complainer who elevates griping to an art form, the cynic who views feedback as attacks, the controller who has all the "right" answers, and the caretaker who's obsessed with others' needs and opinions.

Although there are numerous other people who cause drama in an office, this quartet tends to do the most damage to an otherwise harmonious workplace, the authors posit. They create tension within a group and hijack cooperation and productivity.

But it doesn't have to be that way, they believe. In their consulting work with over 2,500 CEOs and their teams, Warner and Klemp have developed antidotes to office conflict so that teams can become more collaborative and creative, rather than feeling increasingly drained from dealing with difficult personalities.

In this helpful, straightforward roadmap toward a "drama-free office," the authors set up a fictional company and populate a team with associates who display the type of troubling behavior seen at so many real companies. The scenarios they create help give context to their theories and allow readers to connect to "characters" who are trying to change office dynamics.

The guide's most helpful sections profile the four various personalities, including their motivations and standard behaviors. Warner and Klemp then give advice on managing each kind of person, with concrete suggestions that can be employed immediately.

For example, when dealing with a "complainer" a manager can build rapport by praising their curiosity and initiative while being careful not to overdo it out of a desire to gain their approval. A "controller," on the other hand, will need explicit metrics to gauge progress, as well as opportunities to delegate in order to subvert domineering tendencies.

The authors also describe how these approaches can be tested when a team meeting is called. Drawing again on the fictional company example, Warner and Klemp walk a manager through a typical scenario and point out where tension can begin to crop up.

With such an expert, well-articulated guidebook, managers and others will find comfort in knowing they're not alone in dealing with difficult personalities in the office. Best of all, they'll now have tools for turning toxic behavior into collaborative efforts.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (July / August 2011)