Managing the Unmanageable—
How to Motivate Even the Most Unruly Employee

Anne Loehr and Jezra Kaye
(Available from ASOA Bookstore: $11 members, $15 nonmembers)
Reviewed by Corinne Z. Wohl, MHSA, COE

We all have them—the employees whose performance falls within the acceptable level to remain employed but who drive their managers and coworkers crazy with an obvious lack of motivation or conformity to working well within a team structure. Managing the Unmanageable provides strong tools, including tips, techniques, and a framework, to help managers understand the drivers of problematic employee behavior, evaluate the cost benefit of keeping the employee (or not), and ultimately leading employees to become more effective, productive, and motivated.

Loehr and Kaye lay a strong foundation for motivating employees and then layer it with practical methods and specific tools. Solid examples like how to manage the “loose cannon superstar” and how to coach the “office gossip” by addressing the underlying attitude problem are interlaced throughout the text, which demonstrates how the applied steps work and transform behavior. The authors’ use of humor and a down-to-earth, familiar writing style make it a quick and easy read.

The road map provided is called “The 5 Cs”:
• Commit or quit: Do you want to retain the employee or not?

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The authors’ opinion that strong leaders must understand what motivates each team member in order to support their success is central to the way they focus and advise readers on the challenges of managing a multigenerational workforce and the dynamics of such.

The book’s discussion of strategy is quite specific and therefore avoids vague suggestions. Of particular interest to me was the insight that employees who are considered problematic are often displaying the symptoms of larger issues within the organization itself. This obvious work-related dysfunction can actually be considered a gift to a workplace, leading to deeper discoveries about the environment. Thus, the authors recommend not jumping to conclusions, but rather being open minded and thinking about what is truly motivating the “unmanageable employee” before taking any supervisory action.

The power of this book and my reason for recommending it is my agreement with the authors that applying this method would result in managers learning to observe the root of employee behaviors and become more adept at asking the right questions earlier in the process of dealing with those troublesome behaviors. This approach is likely to enhance one’s management style as well as improve employee productivity, not to mention lessen frustration in the area of human resources. That, in itself, could be a dream come true. 

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