

## YOUR TOUGHEST HR QUESTIONS...ANSWERED

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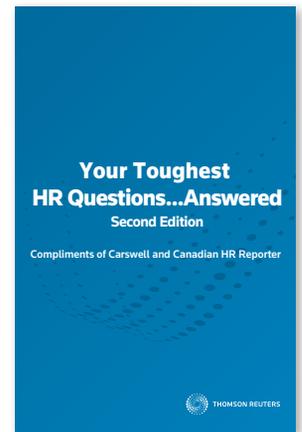
Readers' HR questions are answered every issue in the Insight section of *Canadian HR Reporter*, featured in an issue of *Canadian HR Newswire* and compiled annually into an 80-page booklet with a distribution of 14,000 along with your full-page ad.

Answers are 1,000 words long, providing advertisers an opportunity to showcase their subject matter expertise.

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14,000 copies of booklet:

- 11,000 copies polybagged with the Dec. 1, 2014 issue of *Canadian HR Reporter*
- 2,500 copies at the Human Resources Professionals Association conference in Toronto, January 2015
- 500 copies at the Human Resources Institute of Alberta conference in Edmonton, April 2015



**Dealing with a star performer who's a jerk**

**Question:** One of our most brilliant managers is also a little abrasive – a jerk, for lack of a better term. He does a great job and gets results, but ruts roughed over people in the process and doesn't really care what other people think. What are some tactics for managing this type of star performer?

**Answer:** Let's call a spade a spade. The only reason this manager is free to behave in an abrasive fashion is because he is allowed, encouraged and possibly even incentivized to do so. Had someone in the organization set clear boundaries and held this person accountable long ago, things would never have reached this point.

Contrary to popular myths, abrasive leaders are neither "jerks" nor evil. They are humans trying to do their best in a world they perceive as exceedingly perilous, where they believe their competence and good standing are threatened daily by people who are incapable or unmotivated, and prevent them from achieving their objectives. When they are anxious and they see a threat, they react in a self-defensive through some form of attack.

If someone submits a poorly edited report or is slow to get a new system, their "jerk" perceive their goals or competence to be at risk. They deal with this

**Sharon Bar-David**  
Toronto HR Question

**My experience working with abrasive leaders has taught me that oftentimes... they truly cannot see how their behaviour can be perceived as threatening.**

The most common organizational blind spot is expressed right in the reader's question: "He does a great job and gets results. Well, is that really true? He may achieve results but let's look at the (not so hidden) collateral damage. When people feel they are not recognized, feel worry and anger affect their ability to concentrate and perform to the best. They make mistakes, they lower their commitment to the organization that fails to protect them and instead of working, they spend hours commiserating with colleagues. They engage in under-the-table sabotage. They play safe to avoid ridicule. So what should an organization do if it wants to retain this manager while eliminating the

of good people, complaints, HR and management time spent on dealing with all the above, and exposure to legal risks – and the notion of "He does a great job, becomes highly dubious. It might be worthwhile to quantify these costs before moving forward. Cautious organizational leaders. Organizational decision-makers are afraid of confrontation so they bury their heads in the sand. Or they're afraid of losing their star performer so they have "Frank discussion" that fail to set clear boundaries and consequences. The organization needs to acknowledge its fears and move beyond them.

Set clear boundaries. Initiate a focused discussion (or discussions) with the abrasive leader over a predefined and short period of time, in order to:

- Measure the blunders. The abrasive leader needs to understand how his behaviour affects others, the work environment and the brand itself. Describe the problem behaviours in a precise fashion, the concrete impact they are having and the risks

these behaviours pose. Remember that the manager may not be aware of either his behaviour or its impact.

Set clear parameters. Make it crystal clear the abrasive behaviour must stop.

Outline the consequences of not changing. The person needs to grasp that his job is on the line. Without this clarity, sustainable change is less likely to happen.

Organizational decision-makers need to agree to change. If leaders opt against, then the organization will need to make some tough choices.

Follow up. Support the manager through the change in whatever way is necessary, including close involvement by the abrasive manager's own manager in the form of regular and frequent monitoring of progress, support and guidance.

If done well, this path should solve the problem. However, sometimes the abrasive behaviour is possibly learned in childhood or early on in the person's career. In such cases, a referral to specialized coaching can be most helpful.

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Plus:

- The Answer printed in an edition of *Canadian HR Reporter* with 11,000 copies distributed nationally
- Link to The Answer in an edition of the *Canadian HR Newswire* emailed to 12,000 recipients

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- Inside front or inside back: additional \$1,250
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- Video with *Canadian HR Newswire* and web promotion add-on: \$2,500

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Materials deadline: Oct. 8, 2014

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