

# Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

## Career Center Tips: Co-Worker is a Slacker...and the Boss Doesn't Care!



In every workplace, there is always that one person who doesn't pull his or her weight. They come in late, leave early and spend the day chatting on personal phone calls, walking around the office bothering people or checking social networking sites.

Everyone else has caught on to this slacker behavior, but that fact that they keep engaging in it makes you wonder – do they know what they're doing?

Some simply are not aware...they may have a perpetual victim mentality and feel justified, or will find an excuse or reason for their behavior. However, many are aware and just don't care enough to try harder. The main reason they continue with the behavior is because they are enabled by their bosses instead of being held accountable.

So, let's get this straight: *You* know your co-worker is a slacker, the slacker knows they are a slacker, and your boss, the one person who has the power to do something about this person, doesn't care?

Many bosses choose to ignore this behavior because many are conflict avoidant. They may have very little confidence that a confrontation will end well and think it will make matters worse. However, ignoring a slacking colleague's behavior might seem easier than a confrontation, but when one person on the team is slacking-off, it usually affects everyone else's productivity, too.

Slacker workers not only create more work for others, but their behavior also affects morale and team cohesiveness. As individuals tire of carrying more than their fair share of the load, they become upset. Sometimes their anger is aimed at the person in question, but it's equally common for people to become disappointed in the team's leadership.

Employees will ask such questions as, "Why do the bosses allow this to continue?" and "Why do hard-working employees receive greater and more complicated assignments while low performers are allowed to slide?" As employees spend more time thinking about, complaining about and talking to their friends about inequitable treatment, productivity takes a dive.

## **Mind your own business**

So, what do you do: Mind your own business and let the slacker be a slacker? Or, do you do something about it?

Obviously, people need to pay attention to their own work and make sure they are performing well and not adding to the slacker problem. However, the offending co-worker's behavior needs to be addressed, especially when his or her behavior puts a burden on others.

I would suggest first talking with your lazy co-worker on the chance that they aren't aware of how their lack of work ethic is affecting you. If that still doesn't work, approach your boss and explain that you've tried to talk with your colleague and there has been no change. Make sure you're able to provide specific examples.

In the meantime, here are seven ways to confront and deal with a lazybones co-worker:

- 1. Keep it small** Most problems come in large bundles. A single infraction may include everything from a procedural violation to failure to keep a commitment. Focus on the one issue you care about most. Don't air a list of gripes. Instead, work on one issue at a time.
- 2. Choose your words carefully** Describe the problem using tentative language, then describe what the person is doing -- not what you're concluding. Your conclusions are not only unscientific and possibly wrong, but they're almost guaranteed to create defensiveness.
- 3. Share your good intentions** The last thing you want to do is make others feel like you are attacking or blaming them. You want them to feel safe discussing the issue, so begin by making it known that you have their best interest in mind.
- 4. Try the helpful co-worker approach** Tell them co-worker to co-worker: "I wish someone had done this with me during certain times in my career. I've noticed that you're not doing A, B and C. Rather than avoiding the situation and waiting until our boss comes down on you, I thought I'd tell you I've noticed and you may want to do something to improve."
- 5. Keep the discussion private** This means not only during the conversation, but also after. This will help the other person feel safe talking to you and remedying the problem.
- 6. If it's feasible, try to give the other person an out or excuse** At this point, you've delicately placed the problem in the open and the quicker you finish the discussion the better. Accept any excuse they might come up with -- bogus or otherwise. This is all about helping the other person save face.
- 7. Express concern and thanks** Perhaps the most important thing to remember as you approach a highly sensitive topic is that you care about the other person and want to help him or her address the issue without feeling humiliated in the process. Keeping this in mind will go a long way toward setting the tone and helping an awkward discussion go quickly and smoothly.

