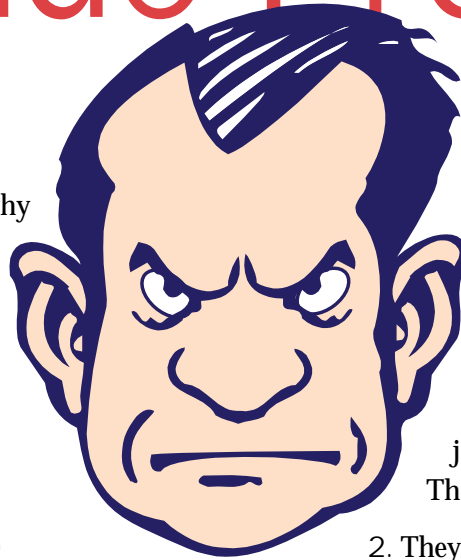


# HAVE YOU GOT AN Attitude Problem?

By Nanette Miner, EdD



There are only three reasons why people don't do what they're supposed to do on the job.

1. They don't know how (knowledge)
2. They haven't been trained properly and/or practiced enough (skill)
3. They don't want to (attitude)

In the world of training, we typically shorten these to KSA. These are the three basic tenets around which training revolves. Of the three which is the hardest to overcome? You betcha. Attitude.

For a number of reasons:

- You try telling someone they have an attitude problem
- People don't wake up one day with an attitude - it is deep seated
- An attitude change takes constant reinforcement.

First, let's briefly delve into the three main reasons people don't do what they're supposed to do on the job.

1. They don't know how. This is a problem of knowledge, or *lack of knowledge*, to be more specific. If you were to plop an employee down in front of a new machine you wouldn't expect them to know how to use it. By the same token, if you change your computer operating system or institute a new

expense report reimbursement procedure, you would expect to have to educate people on the new system or procedure. It's usually fairly obvious to both management and the employee when the inability to do a job is the result of a lack of knowledge. The other two reasons get more complex.

2. They haven't been trained *properly* and/or practiced enough. Notice I didn't say "They haven't been trained." I said they haven't been trained *properly*. There is a long history of research into how adults learn best. It's not complicated and enjoys success nearly every time the process is followed; the problem is, the process is rarely followed. Most people would expect that if you attended a training class you should leave being able to do what you went to be trained to do, right? In fact, absolute success happens in less than 25% of all training situations. Why? Because of the second part of this item: They haven't practiced enough. Training environments are wonderful environments for gaining new knowledge and fabulous environments for trying new skills, but try as we might, the training environment does not mirror real life. The trainee is rarely given the opportunity to practice the new skill back on the job in a continued "safe" environment such as the training environment. Most new skills become "extinct" back on the job due to this lack of reinforced practice when the trainee returns to his or her job.

(Continued)

3. Lastly, the item of attitude, which is the focus of this article. Attitudes are deeply seated and personal beliefs. They are never the same from individual to individual. They take years to develop and just as long to change. Let's try a little experiment: What's your favorite color? Now, what's the color you dislike the most? If I sent you to a training class on the benefits of making your *least* favorite color your *favorite* one, how successful would I be? Would a rational argument against your favorite color change your mind? (Most Americans don't favor green, you know.) No? How about an emotional appeal? (Please! It's imperative you change your favorite color, now.) I'm betting "no" again. Why is that? Because you have an *attitude* about your favorite color - one you've probably held for a few decades. In all likelihood your favorite color and my favorite color are not the same. And I can guarantee you that you cannot change my mind about my favorite color. See how this "attitude problem" might become a problem in the workplace?

As stated earlier, a change in attitude is the hardest training achievement because: ***You try to tell someone they have an attitude problem.*** And I don't even mean "attitude" in the negative sense of the word. You just try to tell someone today that their favorite color is the "wrong" choice and see what the response is. Their response will be based on their attitude. Now think about trying to tell people that their attitude about diversity, sexual harassment, the glass ceiling, or performance appraisals is different than the "preferred attitude" of the company. People might go along in the training, they might even mime the correct behavior back on the job, but a true change in one's attitude does not occur because of a two or four hour training program.

***People don't wake up one day with an attitude.***

People develop attitudes over time. It takes experience, interaction, thought, and rumination before an attitude is set. And those same steps are required to change an attitude as well. Many times people don't realize that their behavior or viewpoint could be any different.

***An attitude change takes constant reinforcement.***

Like a meandering river, a change in attitude takes the path of least resistance. It is not enough to have a slogan or print your company beliefs in the employee handbook. Attitudes must be demonstrated from above and reinforced to the point that anyone working for, or with, your company knows what to expect from an interaction. If you do not want your child to smoke, you don't have that conversation with him just once, right? By the same token, if you would like your employees to be kinder to customers you need to reinforce that message every single day.

People come to the workplace with years of attitude developing experiences. We can change them, but we must recognize that it is the most difficult of all training challenges.



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*Nanette Miner, EdD, is founder of The Training Doctor, LLC, a CT-based firm which specializes in the custom-design of training to increase the performance of an organization's personnel assets. Reprinting of all or part of this article is prohibited without the express permission of the author. Please contact Dr. Miner at 800-282-5474 or nanette@trainingdr.com. Visit www.trainingdr.com for more information.*