How to get combative employees on board

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It can certainly be challenging at times when dealing with combative, outspoken or egotistical subordinates. When people on your team openly disagree with you in front of others, it's typically because they either: 1) feel confident enough to engage in debate because of an open climate that welcomes people's input; 2) think they're smarter than you; 3) constantly need attention; or 4) don't respect your status, expertise, and/or boundaries.

If #1 applies to your situation, that's a good thing as creativity and healthy conflict will bring about effective decision making. If #s 2, 3, or 4 apply then someone is probably out of line and you must address it with them as soon as possible, and if feasible, in a private setting. If you're hot under the collar at that moment, be sure to give yourself some time to simmer down beforehand.

In this setting allow the employee an opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (you can learn quite a bit by listening to them whether they are right or wrong). Ensure they understand why their actions are not conducive to good morale and discipline and give them examples of how they can constructively disagree with you without being disrespectful. Also reassure them that you value their point of view and want them to continue to speak up, but in a more respectful manner.

If this tactic doesn't work, then more drastic actions may be necessary. Human resource departments, if you have one, can give you proper guidance on administering potential disciplinary or termination actions. Ideally, though, you want to avoid getting to this point with employees. Here are some tips on developing respectful and professional employees:

First, when making routine or non-emergency decisions, consult with subordinates prior to determining your final course of action. In doing so you're allowing them to express their ideas, suggestions, and concerns upfront. In fact, these discussions could actually unveil potential issues or problems that you might have otherwise overlooked. Furthermore, they serve as an opportunity for people to learn your perspective of the situation, giving them a better understanding of why certain actions may be necessary.

Applying this tactic is much better than relying on your own individual thinking. You may be smart, but you can't think of everything. Like the age-old saying "two minds are better than one," having multiple people thinking together on any given topic allows them to piggyback off of each other's thoughts, which in turn, will lead to the generation of more creative options or solutions. And quite often, when people know their opinions are heard and considered when decisions are made, they will feel like they contributed to those decisions and will not be as susceptible to openly disagreeing with them later on.

Second, during a crisis or emergency, take charge and lead. Make timely decisions and take on the mindset that you and your people will overcome any challenge. Your decisiveness and confidence will earn your subordinates' respect and they will understand that the time for discussing matters will be after the challenge has been overcome or defeated.

Lastly, keep in mind that it doesn't pay to always have the last word, always be right, or always correct people on every little thing. Sometimes, whether they are right or wrong, it's best to let it go. Know the difference between things important enough that you need to have the last word and things where it really doesn't matter.

If you try everything I suggest and still can't get a combative employee on board, then get them off board.

~ The End ~