

Linkedin and Facebook articles - Jan 2019

Are you being too reasonable? - why we are not tackling extreme difficult behaviour effectively.

On nearly every course I run on my extreme difficult behaviours programme (EDB) I am asked how and why is the issue of extreme and persistent difficult behaviour in the workplace on the increase.



There are many factors to consider, some of which I address in the programme. None are meant to be a judgement on the way organisations respond to EDBs in the workplace but hopefully highlight in an objective way some of the many causes of the problem.

Some core reasons for the increase in this type of extreme and persistent behaviour include:

- Our ever growing focus on self
- The fact we can no longer hide or carry people and let them get away with behaviours we would not normally tolerate
- The ever increasing amount of change occurring for all organisations which I believe is “stirring the hornets nest”. Those who have been doing things their way for so long are now facing increasing pressure to comply to a completely new set of rules in the workplace.

These are some reasons why we have an increase but one of the core reasons we do not effectively manage this behaviour or deal with those perpetrating such actions is that the organisation and managers within the organisation are trying to be fair and reasonable. I have to stress that there is nothing wrong with these sentiments the only problem is that we are actually being far TOO reasonable and EDB’s are simply taking advantage.

Those that do not display EDB characteristics are often challenged and will comply when told they have gone too far. The EDB claims victimisation, bullying and harassment even when they are simply being asked to “do their job” or worst still, being told to do their job.

As they push back the organisation seeks to be reasonable and fair. The only problem is that if you look at all the actions taken or not taken by an organisation accumulatively the actions or lack of are simply way too reasonable. In many cases the actions of managers and the organisation actually disadvantage many other members of staff who are complying to management instructions or requirements even when they do not like it.

As I have often highlighted we need to consider what is reasonable action and this has to be assessed by people like HR professionals, employment lawyers or independent advisors such as ACAS advisors. If the organisation constantly seeks to comply with the EDB’s interpretation of reasonable then alas they will always be at the EDB’s beck and call because unless the action is what the EDB wants, it will never be reasonable to them.

Within the EDB programme I constantly emphasise a number of key points to help organisations and managers come to reasonable and right decisions and actions based on some key fundamental principles, some of which include:

1. The request or demand being made is a reasonable organisational / management point which independent onlookers and average members of staff would consider reasonable.
2. To clearly identify a pattern of behaviour that identifies an EDB, which is often a complete lack of compromise or desire to follow instructions given.
3. A complete lack of reasonability on the part of the EDB for any wrong doing.
4. An assessment by independent professionals which clearly identify the action, request or demand as being reasonable under normal situations and conditions

The bottom line is that if the organisation continues to try and placate an EDB and take action or make decisions they would not do with any other member of staff in a similar situation then they will continue to struggle to manage these individuals and at Tribunal be criticised, not for being unreasonable but way, way, too reasonable.

Martin Smith PhD is a training consultant specialising in extreme difficult behaviour in the workplace. He delivers his EDB Programme across the UK to organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors. Contact Martin directly for further information on his programme and other articles written on this subject.

