

How to become a managerial sniffer dog.

Written by Warren Harmer

By

Dr. Warren Harmer

Business planner and small business consultant

I am a cultivator of great small businesses. I have a Ph.D in science but fell into the world of small business by accident and discovered my passion. My experience owning and consulting to small businesses now spans over 17 years. I like to solve problems using a scientific approach; looking objectively at businesses to see what is happening and applying first principles. In small business, outcomes reign over theory.

Practical, hands-on advice for small business owners is sorely lacking, since most 'experts' have never owned one. Most business information is targeted to big business and their employees.

My objective is to offer instructive, 'how to' information to make business ownership easier, less stressful and more enjoyable.



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Outrageously bad employee behaviour makes for great newspaper stories. You know the ones, like getting injured whilst having sex on a work trip, suing because the chair height was adjusted or the after hours office liaison that the hotel patrons next door photographed. Even though these stories pique our curiosity, these are more the exception, with the rule of bad employee behaviour more of an underlying slow rot that destroys workplace culture. The old adage of '*one bad apple makes the whole bunch go bad*' really does apply when it comes to culture.

Case in point, a client with a happy, highly productive and engaged team that recently expanded to include a specialist technical role. The team, having worked together to produce

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105% growth in 3 years, knew each other very well and kept an equilibrium of fun, focus and outcomes. Enter bad apple. Within 6 months the team wasn't talking to each other, meetings were being avoided, social time stopped and for the very first time, gossip started. The culture was getting scents of rot that needed attention.

To be a highly effective leader, you need to be the managerial version of a sniffer dog. That means always keeping a heightened sense of the mood in each of your team and knowing even the faintest scent of change in attitudes; rot may be setting into your team. Great employees often leave bad teams.

Obvious things like not doing a good job, rudeness or sloppy workmanship are easy picks, but there are some more subtle cues to watch for whilst honing your managerial sniffer dog skills:

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Negative moods, particularly if they increase in frequency or duration. Well trained bad apples can keep their lid on it most of the time, but it can slip out in the occasional outburst. Sometimes you can see it simmering just below the surface. Example bad apple would keep the negative comments to select staff whilst always acting super professionally around senior management.

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Short, sharp communications that are more terse than just efficient. Voice tones and body language are dead giveaways of real feelings and moods.

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Sick days that are frequent or increasing

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Start times that are creeping later and later. Even if they are still turning up on time, watch for changes, specially if they have gone from an early starter to just-on-time

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Spending more time on phone taking personal calls or checking messages

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Bad apples are notorious snipers, making negative comments that are not constructive or sensitive.

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Less or limited enthusiasm for solving problems.

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A decreasing tolerance for unappealing tasks within the role

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Meetings can be hard work for bad apples, with the recent bad apple rarely prepared and always looking like they wanted to be somewhere else, sometimes even forgetting completely.

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Keep a watch for odd times where they are unavailable or have unexpected appointments are signs that they may be having interviews elsewhere.

Without doubt, keeping an eye on the mood in your team overall is vital to keep it happy, healthy and kicking goals. Even the best recruitment processes can sometimes find apples that are shiny on the outside but not so good underneath. Any leader worth their salt needs to watch, listen and observe. Unfortunately that can sometimes that means taking the bad apple out.

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