



Roundtable Mentor,  
**Shana McEachren**, executive coach and organizational development consultant, shared her perspective with our team on what to do about a team member who behaves badly with others, yet delivers great results.

## Mentoring **MATTERS**

**Q**

*An individual on my team is a great worker but really abrasive to other people. I've had several conversations with them about their behaviour but nothing ever changes. My boss has told me that I need to cut them loose but I'm hesitant because they deliver great results. What should I do?*

It can be really challenging to deal with someone who produces great results, yet who is also difficult to work with on a daily basis. It sounds like you are caught between delivering on your team's goals and creating an environment where all your team members feel good about coming to work every day.

*Great leaders find a way to balance achieving results with caring for people.*

They also believe that change is possible and people can learn and grow. Both take work. As a coach, I always like to start with questions to help you decide what is best for your specific situation:

### **What impact is this individual having on other team members?**

It can be very disruptive to work with someone who is abrasive. You may notice other team members avoiding this person or not even wanting to come into work. People perform at their best when they have a work environment that is safe—one that does not require them to tolerate ongoing abrasive behaviour.

### **What is the impact on other stakeholders?**

In today's complex and fast-changing business world, collaboration is more important than ever. People rarely work in isolation, without interaction with others. How is this person's behaviour impacting other employees and leaders in your organization? What other stakeholders - customers, clients, vendors - might be impacted by this behaviour?

### **How does this situation reflect on you as a leader?**

Your behaviours and actions (or inaction) speak volumes about what you are willing to tolerate and what you see as acceptable behaviour in the workplace. Other people can't see what you are thinking. They see only the behaviours and actions that you take (or don't take). Based on how you are handling this situation, what might your team members, peers and leaders be thinking about you as a leader? What do you want them to believe about you and your leadership abilities?

### **Would this individual be surprised if they were terminated?**

Having been in the difficult position of terminating people, I never want someone to be surprised about their termination. If you, or others, have tolerated this abrasive behaviour for a long time, the individual might believe they don't really need to change. It sounds like you have had several conversations with the individual already.

### **What could you do to make sure they are really hearing and understanding the consequences of their behaviour?**

Does this individual want to change? Change is hard and it is practically impossible to help someone change, if they don't want to change. What has this individual done to show you they are willing to invest in changing their behaviour? How might this behaviour be helping the individual cope with their environment? Our engrained behaviours and habits are ways in which we protect ourselves. Abrasive behaviour might be the suit of armour this individual wears for protection from rejection or criticism. If you are interested in learning more about how our behaviours are often protecting us, I recommend reading *Immunity to Change* by Robert Kegan.

### **If you decide to keep this individual on your team, what are your plans for managing and/or changing their behaviour?**

I'm not sure what techniques and tactics you've already tried, but you may want to consider some of the following:

- **Separate work assignments and/or individual projects** - For many organizations, where collaborative work is required, this is not an option. In the end, this would likely only be a short-term solution and it would not help the individual change their behaviour.
- **Feedback and assessments** - Clear feedback from multiple sources can help people understand how others perceive their behaviour. In addition to the feedback you provide directly, there are many assessment tools available. An HR specialist or professional coach could help you select the best one for this situation. A 360° assessment might be particularly useful.
- **Support for change** - It is always hard to change any behaviour. How can you support this individual and help them change? If you want to take on the role of coaching this individual through the change, you will need to commit to spending focused time with them on a regular basis. You might also consider engaging a professional coach or internal HR practitioner to work with this individual to identify specific tools and techniques for changing their behaviour.

- **Communication with your leader** - It sounds like your leader has already made a decision about this individual. If you decide to keep them on your team, you will need to let your leader know your reasons for doing so and your plans for managing and developing this person. What will your leader want to see or hear to know that change is happening? And by when?

In the end, it's up to you as a leader to make the tough decision. Whatever you decide, it will send a strong message about you to the team and the rest of the organization.



**Shana McEachren** is an executive coach and organizational development consultant who is passionate about helping people learn, grow, and achieve their goals. She works with senior leaders in mid to large-size organizations to operationalize strategy and cultural shifts. Her focus is on engaging and aligning employees to create sustainable mindset shifts and behaviour changes.

Shana has a Masters of Education in Workplace Learning and Change from OISE/UofT and a Graduate Certificate in Executive Coaching from Royal Roads University.



**Glain Roberts-McCabe** is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.