

**YOUR
COMPLETE
GUIDE TO**

**GETTING
“PROBLEM
WORKERS”
TO COMPLY**

A professional development document designed for Supervisors, Foremen, Superintendents and Managers who manage workers in safety-sensitive roles.

Introduction

Congratulations! By picking up this guide you've taken the first step to earning compliance from even your most non-compliant workers. The following pages will outline a straightforward and principled approach to earning buy-in and commitment from your most difficult-to-manage workers, also known as problem workers.

What is a "Problem Worker"?

In the context of safety a problem worker can be defined as:

Anyone who repeatedly violates standard operating procedures leading to near misses, citations or at-fault incidents.

This is recognized in a number of ways, from workers making honest errors and omissions all the way to outright defying their supervisors. Workers from the latter group are most likely to be labelled "problems" due to their visible non-compliance, which causes undue stress on both their supervisors and their co-workers.

Consequences of Non-Compliance

There are no limits to how far the consequences can go but here are some of the most common ones we come across:

- Missed Deadlines
- Work Stoppages
- Citations & Fines
- Equipment Damage
- Fatalities
- Environmental Disasters



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Why Not Comply?

It is important to note that non-compliance is not always a conscious choice. Instead, some people are more naturally inclined to not comply due to their “default” personality settings.

“Default” personality settings are how we’re hardwired, also known as our innate impulses or natural responses to our environment. People with high levels of resistance are naturally more likely to be skeptical, resist direction and challenge authority.

In some positions, resistance is a valued trait, such as in engineering or management, bringing a high level of critical thinking, creativity and problem solving to the job.

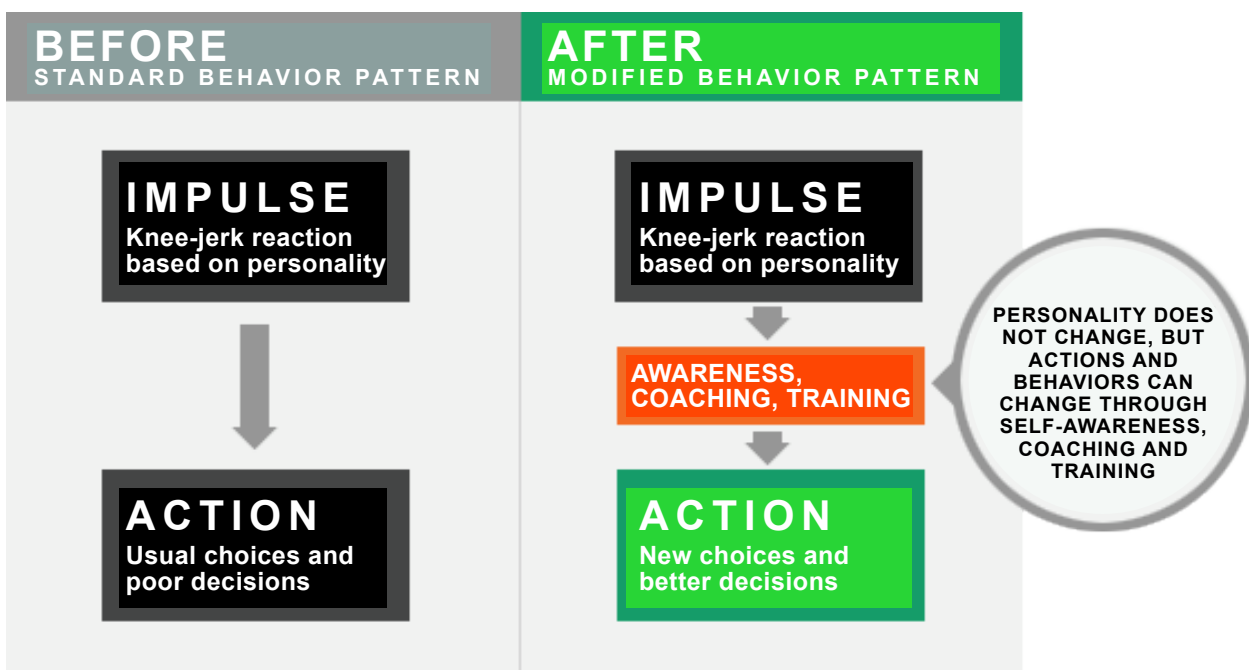
But in an environment where rules and adherence to procedures is important, resistance can be a big problem. These non-compliant employees require a unique and focused approach to management, coaching and training.



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Earning Compliance through BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Now that you know why your *problem workers* might not listen to you, you are ready to begin earning compliance through a process called **Behavior Modification**. We stress EARN because it is not as easy as purchasing a piece of equipment that will magically turn your non-compliant worker into a model employee. It takes hard work, dedication and continued learning to truly modify behaviors in the long run.



Instead of looking at *problem workers* as people who should automatically be avoided, screened out in the hiring stage or even terminated, you can work with them to change the behaviors that cause the problems.

5 Steps to Modifying Behavior

The following is a step-by-step guide to modifying behaviour in *problem workers*. This process has been found to have the greatest effect on those workers with highly *resistant* personalities.

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Step 1: Understanding

In order to effect real change in a worker's behavior, you must first get a deeper understanding of who the problem worker is, what motivates him and why he doesn't comply with corporate safety policies and supervisor direction. There are three primary methods for gaining this understanding:



METHOD #1: OBSERVATION

Observe the worker's at-work behaviors, including the way he reacts to direction – body language, tone of voice, eye contact, etc. – as well as how he approaches his work and co-workers in order to find patterns of activity and an honest, unbiased view of his attitudes and perceptions in action. Highly resistant workers tend to need more observation than others as they are most likely to cut corners when no one is looking.

There are some drawbacks to this process, however. Observation bias, wherein just being present can affect a worker's ability to behave naturally, can skew results. Also, it may increase tensions between you and team members who feel threatened or insulted by your actions.



METHOD #2: ACTIVE LISTENING

The old adage of "2 ears and 1 mouth" applies when trying to understand why your problem worker won't comply. When he is speaking, sharing his opinions and feedback, or even responding to your requests, actively listen for the meaning behind what he's saying, take notes, and take time to formulate a response.

This process will demonstrate respect for your employee, but will also allow you to get to the heart of his discontent, allowing you to come up with better solutions.

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METHOD #3: INFORMATION ANALYSIS

This is a new approach to managing front-line workers, borrowed from the office world. Read the worker's employee profile, including any performance reviews, work history, incident reports and personality assessment reports to get a gauge on where he's coming from and what could be the source of certain poor habits or resistance.

Through this exercise you will be able to better identify the worker's perceptions, what experiences drove him to have these perceptions, and how willing he is to change the ones that keep him from being safe on the job.

Each of these methods can be acted upon individually, but using a combination of all three will drastically increase your chances of fully understanding why your problem worker does not comply.

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Step 2: Education

Now that you have a sufficient level of understanding of your worker, it is time to communicate with him in a way that is most likely to achieve compliance:

CONFIRMATION

Begin by confirming that the worker thoroughly understands what is expected of him in regards to safety and his role within the company. Identify any obstacles, real or perceived, that are in his way of complying fully with your direction.

Some sample questions are as follows:

1. Do you know the rules and procedures you are supposed to follow?
2. Do you know how to report an incident or near miss?
3. Do you know and fully understand the consequences of non-compliance?
4. Is there anything explicit keeping you from following rules and procedures right now? Or in the foreseeable future?

CLARIFICATION

Highly *resistant* workers tend to naturally reject rules that are placed upon them by a third party. An effective way of reducing this natural impulse is to explain the reasons why the rules are in place. Not only will the worker be able to better understand the consequences of non-compliance, he will respect your interest in

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY:

Use the answers to these knowledge-based questions to identify any gaps in working knowledge that can be fixed with theory and skills-based training.

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communicating frankly with him and will learn to trust you over time while also improving safety-related behaviors.

In the discussion of consequences, it's not enough to focus on the company or punitive results of non-compliance. Emphasize the effect the worker's actions have on his co-workers' ability to get work done and operate with a cohesive team culture. Demonstrate how non-compliance makes for a poor working environment and that compliance actually makes for a stronger team and a better workplace for everyone.

Keep in mind: *resistant* workers are a skeptical bunch making the effectiveness of hypothetical examples very limited. Use concrete examples of what NOT to do on the job through real-life case studies and stories, preferably those that take place in his place of work, with his direct co-workers if possible. The closer the example is to his reality, the more impact it will have on changing behaviors.

WARNING:

Unfortunately many managers stop before this step and leave the employee to take ownership of his own development - sometimes dangling the carrot and sometimes threatening the stick. Problem workers need guidance to overcome their challenges - guidance that you can provide if you're willing.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY:

Teamwork is a subject of many high quality training workshops. Place the problem worker in a workshop that allows him to practice teamwork through group exercises.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY:

Select training programs and ongoing personal development activities that help the worker build self-awareness for his unique risk factors and provide straightforward action steps for overcoming his more at-risk attitudes, perceptions and beliefs.

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Step 3: Commitment

In order to affect long-term behavior modification, the *problem worker* needs to hold a sincere commitment to change. Any management book will tell you that you need a plan based on defined goals, but with a *resistant worker*, the plan needs to be developed in tandem rather than forced on him by his superiors if it has any hope of succeeding.

GOAL SETTING

Start your plan by having the problem worker set achievable goals that are both quantifiable AND measurable. Decades of research into behavioral psychology has proven that goals set personally have a significantly higher chance of being achieved than those set by others. This is even truer with highly *resistant workers*.

MANAGEMENT TIP:

If goals are too soft, challenge him to push himself further and come up with goals that will truly take him out of his comfort zone. If goals appear too challenging or unachievable, ask pointed questions to see if he really believes he can achieve the goals and test his level of commitment

PLANNING DOCUMENTATION

Once you and your worker agree upon acceptable goals, write them down in a place that is visible and accessible to both of you. Then, begin writing a personal action plan that will facilitate changing his attitudes and behaviors to match the job requirements.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY:

We discussed selecting relevant training and ongoing development programs in Step 2. Include these programs in the action plan and attach them to specific goals

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Step 4: Enablement

Further to improving the success of your program, it's important to build an environment that facilitates the employee achieving his goals and learning objectives.

BUILDING TRUST

The worker must feel genuine support from you and your organization, removing any barriers he may face in achieving his defined goals. Not only should you support open communication between you and your workers, but it should be encouraged.

THREE SIMPLE RULES

For effective enablement, follow these simple, but extremely important rules:

1. Be available and approachable for discussion, coaching and feedback, regardless of competing needs
2. Be a coach, not a cop
3. Be firm but fair

MANAGEMENT TIP:

One popular approach to removing trust barriers and opening lines of communication is to institute an "open-door" policy. This can be anything from providing an anonymous suggestion box all the way to literally opening your office door (if you have one) and taking any and all requests, feedback and questions that come your way. The key to a successful open-door policy is to act on requests in the most reasonable way possible. If you never act and only accept feedback, eventually workers will see the policy as insincere and will go back to their original "default" habits.

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Step 5: Improvement

The last step is a simple one, but is required for successful behavior modification. Periodic reviews should focus on identifying strengths and weaknesses of the program in order to facilitate continuous improvement. Since each person is created unique, so too should their development plan be personalized to their needs.

SAMPLE REVIEW QUESTIONS

Some sample questions to answer in your periodic reviews are as follows:

1. Is your problem worker meeting his objectives and making improvements?
2. Is he holding himself accountable for his portion of the plan?
3. Is there anything keeping him from achieving his goals, internal or external?
4. Has there been any notable change in enthusiasm from one period to the next of achieving stated objectives?
5. If so, can you identify when and why the worker started to lose interest in modifying his behaviors?

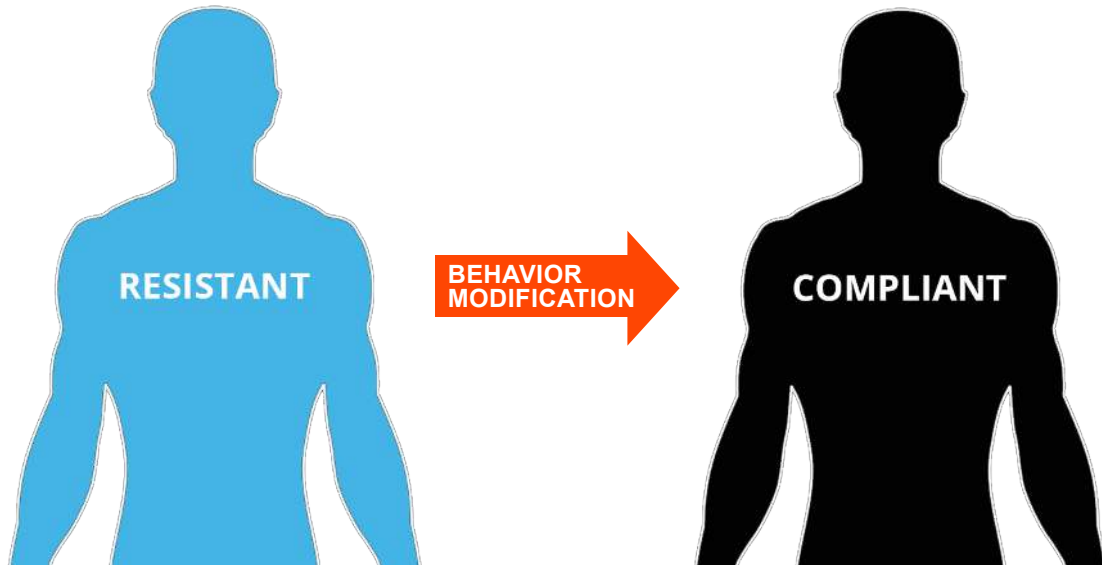
With the answers to these and other questions, make minor or major tweaks in your program and your employees' plans.

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Repeat the Cycle

Behavior modification is a continuous process that requires the commitment of the worker, his direct supervisor and the organization as a whole. Without this he will revert back to his natural “default” settings and continue to be non-compliant.

As we’ve established, non-compliance has major consequences. By doing everything you can to communicate effectively with problem workers and facilitate their behavior modification, you will help prevent predictable incidents and ensure a safer workplace for everyone.



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

TalentClick's solutions are proven to reduce incidents by an average of 20%, which translates into a **savings of \$385,200** per 1000 employees!

CLICK HERE to book a demonstration of TalentClick's Solutions and find out how you can **save time, money, and lives.**

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