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## PROBLEM GENERATORS 7.1

# Problem Generators

The first thing to recognise about problem generators is that they have a hidden agenda which is destructive to your plans, relationships and/or team.

The first hurdle to overcome is our unwillingness to confront the behaviour we observe. It's much easier to attribute a 'nice' reason for the problems they generate but if you do, you are under-estimating the enemy.

### **How Do PGs Operate?**

They attack what you do so you don't focus on what they're doing. For example, you present the new budget to your sales team. Your good people may comment that the budgets are high, but they'll give it their best shot. The PG will accuse you of being interested only in the dollars.

They always talk about what they've done in the past and what they're going to do in the future. They resist production now at all costs. And if you spot that their production is down and discuss this with them, they'll have a record of all your violations to dump back on you to take the focus off their present behaviour.

Another technique is the generalisation. "Everybody thinks you're too tough!" You visualise a wave of unpopular opinion descending on you, where in fact, it is only the PG and his/her friends, and usually only one of them at that.

Another technique is to get you to take on their problem as yours (See Caring For The Monkey Document). Because it isn't yours you can't solve it and you run around wasting your time and, ultimately, getting nowhere. For example, "Mary really annoys me when she makes personal phone calls." You don't have a problem with the calls Mary makes because she keeps them short and is imputing

while she talks. However, you try to handle it, mention to Mary to keep her calls to a minimum — and the other employee finds something else about Mary that bothers her. The fact is, it isn't your problem. You should simply say, "Well, you better handle that with her."

They never take responsibility, they're always into blame — usually against you if you're the one bringing a problem to their attention.

PGs can use a camouflage of niceness. It is so hard to spot because you can't believe that such a "nice" person could be so manipulative. They can also appear so positive that you will miss that they are negative.

- \* PGs make you feel sorry for them
- \* PGs get you to focus on their loss
- \* PGs reduce your certainty and create foggy thinking
- \* PGs appear indispensable (RULE: If indispensable, get rid of them.)
- \* PGs make you feel immoral about handling them
- \* PGs get you to introvert on an element of truth
- \* PGs create confusion around their production
- \* PGs live on hope
- \* PGs get caught in their PR and exaggeration
- \* PGs run scarcity
- \* PGs take your attention off the game and on to their problem
- \* PGs take your attention off the things you do successfully to put time and effort into handling them.

### **Why the PG is so difficult to handle**

Even when you have spotted PGs, it is still difficult to handle them. Some of the problems to be handled will be sourced by the PG, but some will be caused by you making errors of judgment because of the emotional confusion they create.

The first step is to identify how they hook you into playing their game. Nice Guys are the easiest prey for PGs as they will bend over backwards to be 'fair'. Nice Guys will listen to what PGs say, and seriously examine their complaints and comments. Usually, the Nice Guy then introverts on his own behaviour or management style, and this results in him/her taking responsibility for something which is not their problem.

When a PG throws an accusation at you, take what he just said and imagine telling the same thing to the best person in your department. What would that person's reaction be? If the accusation is against you, keep your focus on the result you are looking for and don't allow the PG to side-track you. The trick is to insist on completion of the product he should be producing. It will either straighten him up or get rid of him.

Another technique in dealing with PGs is to do something totally unexpected and apparently irrational. You see, the PG thinks he knows you well enough to predict how you will react in a given situation.

You need to spot how you feel around the PG. Often when you feel down it's because you have just been negatized by a PG. If you try to help him you will fail and will end up feeling useless. Don't miss that this was intended.

If you identify the PG as undermining you and your team, then it helps if you look on 'him as an enemy until he proves otherwise. Don't give him ammunition by being 'fair', pleasant or nice to him.

The best solution: Don't connect up with PGs in the first place.