How to Deal with the Office DRAMA QUEEN

Between the wannabe main characters and the sneaky antagonists, there can be a lot of hair pulling at work. Here's how to identify their tactic, side-step it and smash your deadlines all in a day's work.

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Office drama is something we've all dealt with, but is it inevitable? Unfortunately, it is, argues Susi Astengo, an expert career coach and founder of CoachMatching. In 2016, she won the Businesswomen Association's top prize, so she really knows a thing or two about surviving (and thriving) in an office environment. 'Drama in the workplace comes because of differences – your colleagues aren't usually bad people, but they come with their own baggage. When you come to work, you're 100% a person, not just a work persona', she explains.

However, this doesn't mean that it's an easy thing to work with someone who may be a bit of a character. But you can make it a lot easier by keeping your interactions factual and work-related, advises Penny Holburne, a multi-award-winning business and career coach, and founder of her own coaching business. These experts break down the five types of office drama queens – and how to make peace with them.

WHY THE DRAMA DEVELOPS

Way back in 1968, psychiatrist Stephen Karpman developed a model termed 'The Drama Triangle' which explains how conflict relates to what we believe about ourselves and our environment. This triangle revolves around three roles – victim, rescuer, and persecutor. The victim is the 'feel sorry for me' role; the rescuer is the 'helper' or challenger role; and the persecutor is the resentful, 'bullying' role. When we're stuck in this triangle, we tend to take up one of these roles as the drama continues. The endless cycle of aggression, victimisation and rescuing continues endlessly – until you make a concerted effort to break free from this detrimental mindset.

KNOWING YOU, KNOWING ME

'To avoid the drama, and avoid the triangle, you need to stay in touch with the level-headed part of yourself. You need to check your assumptions. They are what drive us to perceive things in a certain way,' Susi explains. You must be aware of your boundaries, triggers and make decisions on how to react based on your level of self-awareness, she further elaborates. With this, we can flip the script starring these 5 common characters:

1 THE BOOMER BOSS

Google 'Boomer Boss' and you'll be overwhelmed by young employees complaining about their 'out-of-touch' or 'insensitive' bosses. Often, they will disregard any advice or input from their younger employees in the name of experience. Penny advises: 'The person may need time to digest any suggestions. They may not accept your ideas immediately but might come to value it later. So have some patience and see what happens'.

Their Role: Persecutor
Their Script: Impatient with younger colleagues, wanting to keep the performance 'as it's always been'.
Upstage them: Build your credibility. Penny suggests you build credibility amongst your colleagues (especially other older employees) and stick to doing your job well. They can't attack if you are impenetrable.

2 THE YOUNGSTER

Forbes describes Millennials and Gen Z as the employees redefining what 'work' means. These employees appreciate validation but may be offended by criticism and insensitivity about personal circumstances. They also won't stand for any power trips. They are most likely the number one antagonist to Boomers.
Their Role: Rescuer-Victim
Their Script: Challenging authority and the status quo. Wanting to redefine standards set out by older or previous employees at the company.
Upstage them: Harmonise to their tune. When criticism needs to be given, stick to facts. Allow them to make suggestions and give them guidance when needed (ask asked for).

3 THE GASLIGHTER

As Penny puts it: 'You are not likely to have a genuine discussion with a gaslighter, so limit your interaction – a lot. Everything in the conversation will be designed to bring you down and get you to doubt your own sanity. They will always make themselves the most important person and the person always in the right'.
Their Role: Persecutor
Their Script: Experts at throwing others under the bus. Gaslighters will keep tabs on your every move, twist it and use it against you.
Upstage them: Gaslighters thrive on triggering your sense of fairness. To avoid it, keep a record of your conversations and have a 'partner in crime' to vouch for you.

4 THE BABY

'I can't believe have SO many deadlines', 'You think you have a lot, I have blah blah' – enough with the run-on. We experience different levels of anxiety, stress and overwhelm at work, but some will let theirs explode onto those around them. Enter: The Baby.
Their Role: Victim
Their Script: Catastrophises every situation they're in, every decision and every task they're assigned at work.
Upstage them: Focus on the positive in conversations. Remain neutral and help them to build solutions.'

5 THE BOUNDARY PUSHER

Often a person in power will push the boundaries of when, where, and how you do your job. A recent *BuzzFeed* article had young employees share how their bosses ordered them around, all in the name of being the boss. Here, you should nurture your sense of relatedness as it is challenged, Susi says.
Their Role: Persecutor
Their Script: Nosier than a mole. Wants to know your schedule to bombard you with extra tasks, or gaslight you about your work ethic.
Upstage them: Work hard and communicate your boundaries. Remember to empathise with your boss, who probably has trauma from having their own boundaries pushed.

Turn the page and adopt your own method. When it's time for the curtain call, you'll have given a performance worthy of stealing the show. ■