



## Simple Script for Dealing with a Toxic Employee

This script is designed to serve as a guide for addressing toxic employee behavior. While your specific scenario may differ, the language and structure provided can be adapted to suit your needs. Use this template as a foundation and modify it to reflect the unique dynamics and challenges in your workplace.

Print a copy of this script and mark any revisions needed to tailor it to your situation. Once customized, take time to rehearse your key points so you can approach the conversation with clarity and confidence. Then, hold a respectful and direct discussion with your employee.

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### **Example Scenario:**

“Patty” has been with the company for over 30 years and currently holds a senior clerk position. While her institutional knowledge is vast, her behavior is actively harming team dynamics. New employees assigned to her for training often resign within weeks, citing her dismissive tone, unwillingness to share critical information, and overall hostility. Patty’s negative attitude extends beyond new hires: she regularly gossips, “tattles” on coworkers, and promotes a culture of mistrust. Most of the team avoids her, including her manager, “Ava,” who fears confrontation due to Patty’s long tenure and the risk of losing her undocumented expertise. However, the continued turnover and toxicity have reached a tipping point. Ava must now address the issue head-on with a firm stance on what changes must occur.

**Ava’s Purpose:** Set clear expectations, hold the employee accountable, and offer a professional path forward: grow or go.

### **Start With Respect & Purpose:**

“Patty, thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I’d like to have an open and respectful conversation about some concerns that have come up. You’ve been with the company for a long time, and the experience and knowledge you bring are deeply valued. At the same time, we all play a role in maintaining a positive and professional work environment, no matter our position or tenure, and that’s what I’d like to talk through today.”

### **Identify the Specific Issues:**

“Patty, I want to have an open and honest conversation with you about observations and feedback I’ve gathered. There appears to be a pattern that has emerged, specifically related to your interactions with new employees. Several individuals who were assigned to train with you have chosen to leave the organization shortly after starting. Their

feedback has consistently indicated that they felt unsupported, unclear about their responsibilities, and, at times, discouraged by the tone and approach used during their training.

Additionally, I've received ongoing feedback from other team members - and have seen it firsthand - that your interactions often include negativity, gossip, or reporting on others in ways that erode trust and contribute to team tension."

**Reframe the Power Dynamic:**

"I want to be transparent with you, while some of these behaviors may not have been addressed directly in the past, moving forward we're placing a renewed focus on building a healthy and supportive team culture. My goal is to support your success, and part of that includes establishing shared accountability. That means being mindful of how you train and interact with others, and doing your part to contribute to an environment built on trust, respect, and professionalism.

**Outline the Expectations:**

"Looking ahead, I'd like us to focus on a few key expectations that will help create a more supportive and successful team environment:

- New employees should feel welcomed, respected, and set up for success through clear and constructive training.
- It's important that we foster a sense of collaboration, which means avoiding behaviors like gossip or sharing concerns in ways that divide rather than unite the team.
- Your knowledge is incredibly valuable, and we need your help in beginning to document key processes so others can reference them when needed.

These expectations are essential to moving forward in this role and I'm here to support you in meeting them."

**Present the Choice**

"At this point, you have the opportunity to shape how this moves forward".

"One path involves taking this feedback to heart and making a sincere commitment to grow by adjusting how you interact with others, how you train new team members, and how you contribute to the overall culture.

If those changes don't feel realistic, or aligned with where you are right now, then it may be worth reflecting on whether this role continues to be the right fit for you.

Your actions in the coming weeks will help determine the next steps. My goal is to support your success, but continued issues without progress will lead us to a more formal process, which could include involving Human Resources."

**End with Accountability**

"Let's plan to check in again in about two weeks to talk through how things are going. In the meantime, I'll be staying connected with the team and paying attention to how everyone's working together, just to ensure we're creating the kind of environment we all want to be part of."

“Patty, I want to see you succeed. I truly value the knowledge and experience you bring to the team. I also understand that change can be challenging, but it’s an important part of helping the team move forward together. This is a real opportunity to reset, rebuild trust, and demonstrate what it looks like to be a strong team player and a supportive presence for others.”

**Tips: Anticipating Patty’s Potential Reaction**

Patty’s Potential Reaction:	Ava’s Suggested Response:
Defensive or angry	I understand this may be hard to hear. I’m here to support you if you’re ready to grow.
Crying or emotional deflection	I can see this is upsetting. The intent isn’t to hurt, it’s to create accountability.
Threatening to quit	That’s your decision. If you choose to stay, this is what’s required to move forward.
Blaming others or denying	This isn’t about others, it’s about the impact of your actions and what needs to change.
Saying 'that’s just how I am'	This is about professionalism, not personality. We all must align with the team’s expectations.

**Final Takeaway:**

This script is designed to present the employee with a clear choice with dignity and respect. Whether Patty chooses to stay and make the necessary changes is ultimately her decision. Your role as a leader is not to make that choice for her, but to protect the integrity of the team and ensure that harmful behaviors no longer go unaddressed.

By setting clear expectations and boundaries, you’re not only holding Patty accountable, but you’re also protecting the well-being of your team and reinforcing the culture they deserve.