

## What are Workplace Saboteurs?

A workplace saboteur is an individual who intentionally and often maliciously disrupts or undermines the operations, productivity, or morale within a workplace environment. They engage in harmful activities to cause damage, chaos, or personal gain at the expense of the organisation or its employees.

A workplace saboteur may employ various tactics to achieve their goals, such as:



- 1. Spreading false information:**

Saboteurs may spread rumours, misinformation, or malicious gossip to create a hostile and toxic work environment, sow discord among colleagues, or damage the reputation of individuals or the organisation.

- 2. Undermining productivity:**

They may purposely disrupt workflow processes, hinder communication, or withhold critical information to impede project progress or hinder team productivity.

- 3. Manipulating interpersonal relationships:**

These individuals may actively try to create conflicts, foster mistrust, or manipulate others' emotions and actions to create a toxic work environment and hinder teamwork.

- 4. Damaging property or equipment:**

Although less common, this can include vandalising company assets, sabotaging machinery, or intentionally causing accidents that result in harm or financial loss.

- 5. Theft or fraud:**

Workplace saboteurs may steal company resources, intellectual property, or sensitive information for personal gain or to harm the organisation. They may also commit fraud by falsifying documents, manipulating financial records, or embezzling funds.

- 6. Cyber sabotage:**

In today's digital age, workplace saboteurs may employ tactics such as hacking into systems, spreading malware or viruses, or conducting other malicious activities to disrupt operations, compromise data security, or damage the organisation's reputation.

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Identifying and dealing with workplace saboteurs is crucial for maintaining a healthy work environment and protecting the organisation's interests. Companies need to foster open, psychologically safe communication, establish clear policies and procedures, and promote a positive organisational culture to minimise the chances of such harmful activities.

However, before we get to the steps you should consider when approaching and managing a workplace saboteur, please consider whether they need your help and support first rather than your criticism or discipline-based approach. Try to support and repair first.



## Managing Workplace Saboteurs?

Dealing with saboteurs can be challenging, but taking **prompt**, appropriate action to prevent the damage and ill feelings they can cause is crucial for all concerned.

However, we want you to consider a saying that we believe often underpins the actions and thinking of saboteurs, “belief creates reality”. We believe this statement to be so important that we have written a separate handout about it ([Please click here](#)). The ability of our belief to create our reality is a powerful psychological phenomenon, so when managing a saboteur, we must consider it and investigate it thoroughly. What drives their belief?



For example: Have you ever woken up from a disturbing dream and felt physically frightened or panicked by the reality of that dream? If you have, your mind reacted to that dream because it believed that what was happening in your dream was real. So, when dealing with someone who behaves this way, we need to investigate **why** they believe what they do and the impact.

Here are some steps to consider when managing a workplace saboteur:

**1. Their manager/leader must manage this:**

We employ managers to manage their people, and if the managers are using Emotional Intelligence (EI) within the team, they will know their people well. Usually, this means they have a trusted relationship with their team members, so this **must** be the starting point. HR can be notified but is not involved at this stage. HRBPs must learn how to approach and use “consequence conversations”. Do **NOT** let managers dump this on HR.

**2. Gather evidence:**

Before you approach the saboteur, document any suspicious activities or incidents related to the saboteur. Collect tangible evidence that supports your claims, such as emails, reports, or witness accounts. This evidence will be helpful when you approach the saboteur or present the case to them for the first time. Without this, they may be able to claim it is hearsay as you have no evidence. You will need such evidence to involve HR officially and even for higher authorities if that becomes necessary due to their continued behaviours or actions.

**3. Maintain confidentiality:**

Be discreet when discussing the situation with others. Sharing information too broadly could alert the saboteur and make them feel everyone is closing in on them. Also, it may become difficult to gather evidence or take appropriate action if/when there is a requirement to do so. Only involve key individuals who are necessary to address the issue.

**4. Assess the motive and intent:**

Try to understand the underlying reasons behind the saboteur's actions. Is it due to personal grievances, conflicts, or an attempt to gain an advantage? Assessing and understanding their motive can help determine the most effective approach for resolution.

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