

Walking Dead & Well Poisoners

You have probably heard plenty of reference to **Well Poisoners** – the term coined for those individuals in the workplace with a poor attitude (to safety) yet with a lot of influence over others. These are a dangerous class of people as they tend to contaminate their environment and infect others around them. They do this principally through cynical, derogatory comments; they tend to see the worst in a situation; they have a pessimistic outlook; and, they encourage (directly or indirectly) unsafe behaviour by others. Their weaker-minded, less influential friends are the **Walking Dead** or workplace zombies. With their poor attitude but less influence, this lot are just miserable, negative, looking for the easy option and de-motivated. They can suck the life out of a team (so perhaps they have more influence than we give them credit for).

The **Well Poisoners** get on well with the **Walking Dead** as they provide them with an audience and help to massage their egos, thereby further enhancing their influence. But what a **Well Poisoner** really craves is *fresh meat* in the shape of **Players** (good attitude, not much influence). There is nothing that a **Well Poisoner** likes more than to recruit someone new, dragging them down to their own level and growing their circle of **Walking Dead** followers.

You can perhaps recognise each of these characters among the people that you work with or have worked with in the past. The **Walking Dead** and **Well Poisoners** will need careful handling but the first question should be: “*Why are they like that?*” Let us start with the premise that they are not just naturally bad people – very few people are. Have they always been like that? Were they like that when they joined the business, in which case, why were they taken on? More likely, they have developed into those roles as a result of their environment, their experiences and the attitudes of others around them. Have they had their great ideas ignored? Have they been sidelined and left out of discussions and decision making? Do they find that they never get any feedback? How have they been treated in the past? Do they have effective communication channels open to them? There are many questions that we could ask but a couple stand out that we should face up to first:

- “*Have I done or said anything that might have helped create their current attitude?*”
- “*How am I perceived by others?*”

Once they have been identified and we have understood their motivation we can start to deal with them. Understanding and dealing with the causes behind their characteristics may put you well on the way to changing them. **Well Poisoners** in particular must be challenged – not always easy due to their influence. Maybe they don’t recognise how they come across to others, they may well see themselves as **Champions** (good attitude, plenty of influence) and don’t recognise that their behaviour gives a different impression. If you can convert these people they become a valuable asset. On the other hand if you cannot convert them maybe you need to ask the difficult question: “*Is this the kind of working environment that is*

suitable for someone like that?” As the saying goes: “If you can’t change the people then change the people!” Team members can also play their part by not giving the **Well Poisoners** an audience; challenging the nonsense they talk; and, not following their example. This in turn will help to reduce their influence and isolate them.