

# Difficult teachers: recent development on how they can be dealt with

[Profession](#), [Teacher](#)



Competition as a factor plays an important role in shaping up nearly all sectors in the present operational environment. Competition is rife in all sectors and education is swimming within these tides. Success of the teaching staff is largely guided by results and having even two ineffective teachers could lead to a bad name to a principal and his administration (Brock, & Grady, 2003). Inefficiency of the teaching staff can lead to loss of accountability and even place a school at risk of losing its reputation or failing to develop any.

Like in the result oriented business world the ability of the teaching staff to set standards of peak performance or be close to the top performers is important in ensuring that parents and hard working teachers remain motivated and always seeks the best for students. Such levels of motivation are bound to trickle down to students and the result may be improvement in the levels of performance and development of a culture of success (Hopkins, 2009).

It is thus upon administrators especially principals and head of department to ensure they develop creative, humane, supportive, tough and timely approaches to deal with teachers who are not performing for one reason or the other. This is further complicated if the teachers being referred to are difficult to deal with. Appreciation of the Problem In practical teaching, many principals confess of having dealt with difficult teachers in more than one occasion. It is generally believed that each institution has what can be referred to as troubled teacher (Hopkins, 2009).

The fact that the teachers are difficult to deal with must not be assumed to be directly correlated to their performance. In some cases the best teachers can prove to be hard to deal with which presents a larger problem considering the impact they could have on a school if they were to quit or their problem addressed badly. It is generally true that troubled, exhausted and even confused teachers have multiple negative impacts on morale and school environment.

Such troubled teachers have the ability to single handedly break the team spirit that is critical to staff success which results in fragmentation that is a breeding ground to failure in issues relating to school improvement initiatives. Difficult teachers have been termed by some researchers as a proverbial elephant in the staff. All in the staff are often aware of the existence of such a character but none is willing to confront for the fear of losing or what most refer to as being 'trampled'.

Many low performing and even high performing (based on result) institutions are overrun by such teachers who appear to be operating within their own code. It has been observed that some principals are even scared of such troubled teachers and though they are aware of their existence they do little to address the situation (Wilmore, 2007). The reality is that ignoring the existence of such teacher does little to address the situation which is let to manifest within the teaching environment and with time the negative effects may even be observed in the levels of performance that can be attained by a staff (Brock, & Grady, 2003).

Failure in performance may not only result to the ousting of a principal but also affect the lives of students who may have had better futures had it not been for the failure of the administrators in addressing difficult teachers. Principals must be appreciative of the fact that their roles as leaders is worth the risk because the goals seek more than material gain or advancement. This should also involve appreciation of the fact that the lives of the people within the school community and even outside the school community thus the society is dependent on the school system to provide meaning and purpose.

This appreciation must be reinforced by personal assessment of the administrators to determine if they have the ability to effectively handle difficult teachers. Principals as managers and leaders have the role to ensure that the school community is motivated by dealing with the challenges to high levels of motivation and ensuring that impediment or threats to achievement of educational goals are addressed (Brock, & Grady, 2003). Administrators have the ability to misjudge a straight or good teacher for a trouble maker. This is especially true for administrators who are still getting the feel of being in a new environment.

Depending on the existing administration for support is cited as a possible avenue to ensuring that new administrators get a feel of the environment and therefore develop objective assessment of the staff including their own ability to effectively manage the challenges presented by the environment they are in (Wilmore, 2007). Difficult teachers can come in hordes or could be unique in a staff that is highly cooperative. Even in a dysfunctional school community, there are teachers who are considered difficult. Researchers

have come up with values that they view as being important in dealing with difficult teacher in varied conditions.

The values that must be inherent of administrators can be developed and play a role in ensuring that difficult teachers are dealt with in both functional and dysfunctional environments. Assertive administration is cited as one of the critical success factors in dealing with difficult teachers. The term difficult in difficult teachers is not out of their knowledge of martial arts or spiritual ability rather is assertiveness that manifests negatively. The level of assertiveness that such teachers display has been cited by some as being manifested in difficult to deal with but successful teachers in class.

Disregard for the existing systems and rule on a regular basis that defines difficult teachers is a manifestation of a negatively developed assertive nature (Brock, & Grady, 2003). It is only an assertive administrator that can effectively manage such a teacher and even reform his ways into those accepted within the established systems. Character building is an important quality that administrators should possess if they are to effectively deal with difficult teachers. Character building is the ability to mould the perception and thereafter actions of a teacher in a manner that leads to their entry or fit into an existing set of values.

Character affects perception and therefore actions and should thus be developed in a manner that is positive if the actions are to lead to generation of value to both students and other teaching staff (Wilmore, 2007). Many researchers have come up with findings that blame the behavior of difficult teacher on the nature of their cognition. Such difficult teachers display their

negative character irrespective of the nature of administration thus addressing the character issues appear to be the best approach to dealing with difficult teachers.

Communication is considered one of the important tools that managers and leaders have in ensuring that goals are transmitted through out a system and people are motivated towards achieving set goals. Under constrained teaching environment, teachers may take on repulsive behavior to gaining the attention of the administration to issues that may be affecting their efficiency in teaching. While a negative teaching environment is not a precondition for difficult teachers it is a possible cause of negative teachers (Wilmore, 2007).

Communication is an avenue through which the nature of difficult teachers can be discerned and it is only from this understanding that suitable intervention measures should be developed. Administrators must study and personalize the art of affective communication if difficult teachers are not to arise from a teaching environment and to also ensure a proper understanding of the negative teaching behavior. Developing a positive school culture has come up as one of the critical success factors in reducing the prevalence of difficult teaching.

Poorly performing schools have been recorded as being a breeding ground for difficult teachers (Whitaker, 2002). A poor school culture develops a negative picture of what is expected of a teacher and develops a breeding ground for negative perception and energy that could result in difficult teachers. Some researchers have tried to develop a theory in a bid of have a

clear image of difficult teacher formulation in an environment which postulate that a negative culture direct the otherwise positive energy that could have been channeled into positive development to poor interaction with students and other members of staff (Wilmore, 2007).

The role of developing a positive culture has been studied in business and involves interaction with positive people and promotion of positive norms and values. The role of managers and leaders is prominent in this phase and could be the defining factor between failure and success. Contribution of the administrators to teaching and addressing issues that teachers and students are faced with plays an important role in ensuring that administrators are appreciated as part of the school systems.

By contributing to issues relating to staff development administrators are placed in a position where they can effectively monitor events within their environment (Whitaker, 2002). This is in line with proactive approaches to issues where reporting systems are a formal or documentation systems and not an avenue through which leaders gain insight of problems. By actively contributing to the school community and being at the fore in addressing issues, administrators are put in a position where they can be effective in ensuring overall school development.

Conducting assertive interventions and timeliness are the other important values that administrators must display to be able to effectively manage difficult teachers. It is generally believed that the most effective way to deal with students is addressing the teachers. A school in its basic definition takes on a hierarchical structure was the teachers act as a bridge between

students and the administration (Whitaker, 2002). Assertive intervention systems are important in ensuring that other teachers whom are often aware of the existence of a problem become informed of strategies that are being taken to address them.

Timeliness is a value that is of critical importance in minimizing the negative effects of difficult teachers in a school community. Procrastination has been cited as one of the avenues through which administrators let negative effects of difficult teachers affect existing systems with negative repercussion (Whitaker, 2002). Addressing procrastination is therefore a critical success factor and can only be attained if timeliness as a factor is ingrained within systems seeking solutions. Manifestation of Difficult Teaching

The ability to identify problematic teacher is important in ensuring that the effect that he has on other members of the teachings staff are mitigated. Difficult teachers come in different forms according to a recent survey that seeks to develop a clear understanding of difficult teachers (Whitaker, 2002). Understanding the exact manifestation of difficult behavior in teachers and interaction with other staff members and administration is important in devising strategy that can be used in dealing with threats that they pose.

Complaining and negative teachers have been cited as the most difficult to deal with. It is advisable that such teachers be directly and confidentially addressed (Waterman, & Waterman, 2006). Ensuring that teachers are aware of the effects that their behavior has on existing system and achievement of the educational goals and presenting a platform for them to



raise issues that may be affecting them in a confidential manner is important in ensuring the interventions do not manifest negatively. Research shows that some principals however choose to ignore the negative comments from difficult teachers.

Though success of the interaction in such a case is dependent on the degree with which the administrators can focus on positive staff members, ignoring the negative staff members is misplaced and could be counter-productive. Stating expectations and offering assistance have for a long time been considered vital steps in dealing with difficult teacher; however, the change in environment and the need for leaders and managers to be proactively involved in day to day running of their systems has led to increased requirement on administrators (Whitaker, 2002).

Noise makers and anarchist are considered the second most common characteristic of difficult teachers. Directly addressing their behavior groups is considered the first step to addressing issues they may be faced with. Stating what is expected of them including policies, behavior and expectation while monitoring progress are also considered success factors (McEwan, 2005). Research shows that if the initial intervention framework fails in developing observable change in the teachers placing them on an improvement plan is considered the next phase by many.

In most cases, the intervention system for these behavior group end with a teacher being asked to leave a faculty after all measures fail in developing positive behavior change. Difficult teachers can also be defined by high propensity to gossip. While gossip may be considered a form of

communication in any social setting if it continues to grow it could prove difficult for administrators to replace it with the truth. A factor that is widely appreciated as being a stumbling block to effectively addressing issues that an organization is faced with is gossip which affects the level of efficiency that can be attained in communication.

Administrators must ensure that such members of staff are made aware of the negative effects that gossip could have to the attainment of school goals. Most leadership experts point to the fact that openly showing disgust and disapproval of gossip could lead to positive results (McEwan, 2005). Institutions that are aware of the negative effects that continual gossips has on communication efficiency have in the past asked difficult teachers to consider leaving a faculty if they could not deal with their love for gossiping.

Backstabbers are another problem group where the direct approach is cited as being most effective. In fact a more direct approach than in all other cases has to be used in confronting culprits with questions on the why, what, where and when regarding a case. Depending on the magnitude of a case the intervention systems may either involve letting the culprit be aware of the fact that his actions have been brought into light and citing insubordination which may also involve restating expectation of behavior and initiation of an improvement plan (McEwan, 2005).

Research shows that most principals are aware of the existence of such backstabber but consider their actions less influential on attainment of goals. Backstabbing is viewed by principals as differing opinions rather than lack of appreciation of the input of other members. This is a negative perception

that is reflective of the differences that exist between practice and research. Discussion There appears to be a wide appreciation of the extent of difficult teachers. Researchers have tried to dissect the problem from different dimensions to ensure that its emergence, manifestation and even approaches to its management are well understood.

Behavior development; nature of experiences that a teacher has undergone; the nature of the operational environment and objectives of the teachers are factors cited as being vital in defining the extent and effect of difficult teachers. There is no doubt on the effects that such teachers could have on the levels of morale and even attainment of administrative goals. One of the most important developments in recent research is an effort to develop a clear understanding of the different behavior groups and how each group can be addressed.

Direct measures and restatement of the vision have been stated as being vital in ensuring effective management of different cases. The role of the administrators and the critical success values are applicable in the measures that have been developed for different behavior groups. It is apparent that there is little that can be done by researchers to address individual cases however administrators can pick from the general guidelines that have been developed to come up with measures in management and leadership that can ensure difficult teachers are dealt with in a manner that leads to professional development.

Critical review of success factors and steps involved in mitigating and addressing specific behavior problems points to the fact that effective

leadership and management are important in identification and address of difficult teachers as a key problem in achievement of schooling goals. The art and science aspect of management have to be reinforced with appreciation of the potential effect that problem teachers have on attainment of a school's objectives and facilitation of communication and transmission of positive values in attaining efficiency.

There is no doubt on the role played by innovation, creativity, skills, experience, coordination and overall strategic management in ensuring difficult teachers are managed and their effects addressed. Conclusion Difficult teachers have the potential of disrupt learning and lead to loss of morale in the teaching staff. Understanding the teachers which involve ensuring high levels of interaction with them and application of strategic management principles in addressing the challenge they present have widely been discussed by researchers.

There however appears to be a gap between research and practice in that some principals and administrators despite the effects that difficult teachers have on attainment of school goals ignore their existence. Researches on how this appreciation can be developed are lacking and are one of the key areas that have to be addressed if the current state of research is to be helpful to practicing administrators. Little has been done with regards to difficult administrators who may in fact pose a greater threat to attainment of schooling goals.

A further understanding of the cause of difficult behaviors among teachers must be developed to create a good platform for administrators to base their

interventions. In a nutshell, the current researches provide a suitable platform for definition of strategic directions that can be taken in addressing difficult teachers; it is however upon administrators and the entire school community to develop specific approaches that are relevant to their cases which differ different owing to different values and expectations that characterize schools.