



1 One Tough Babe

An especially difficult employee is the one who is extremely obnoxious with everyone—always acting tough and coming on like gangbusters. Such behavior can be even more of a problem when he or she isn't directly your employee, but does work for you. You need the employee to do a good job to support your own work and your staff's work, but you aren't directly in charge of the person. So with a mixture of bluster and manipulative charm, the employee can literally end up controlling you.

That's the situation which Alice faced when she became a manager for a loan brokerage company. Her job was to manage the work of a half dozen loan brokers who spent much of the time out in the field, as well as coordinate everyday office operations. One of the employees who worked in the office, but not directly under Alice's supervision, was Cherise. She processed the loans, which mainly involved filling out the detailed documentation required for each loan package so it would be approved by the bank. This was a highly technical job and Cherise had the skills to do a good job, which she parlayed into a free pass to run roughshod over everyone in the office. The one exception was the company owner, to whom she reported directly. With him, she turned on the charm and the tears to excuse the upset and chaos she created by dumping on everyone else.

Alice had her first brush with what working with Cherise would be like when Cherise came into her office, leaned over, and said, "Listen, babe, I'm not afraid of you." Then, in a sudden change of tone, she continued sweetly, "That said, I'll do everything I can to help you be successful." Alice was quickly filled in by the other employees who described their repeated run-ins with Cherise. As Alice related, "Cherise had a kind of destroy and conquer approach. She saw everyone as the enemy and she looked for everyone's weaknesses and tried to exploit those."

Cherise also dressed the part, a mix of tough and sexy. She wore leather pants and skirts, tight blouses, stiletto heels, and had long flowing hair. She rode a Harley motorcycle to work and revved it up when she arrived at the office; she also owned two pit bulls. "She was one tough cookie," Alice commented, "and she wanted everyone to know it. Though she was part of the office I was managing, she wanted to make it very clear from the outset that she was not working for me."

It was a schizophrenic kind of working arrangement that made for craziness. Typically, Cherise would come in late, about 10:30 a.m., and leave early, about 3:30 p.m. During that time she was like a hurricane sweeping through the office, laying waste to all in her path. "She would scream at me and the loan brokers that things weren't ready. She would yell at the vendors—the bankers who were taking the completed loan applications to the potential investors—that they hadn't completed their part of the applications right.

If anyone complained to the head honcho about her behavior and he spoke to her about this, she would go into her "poor me" act, even though she was earning about \$200,000 a year. Acting as the abused party rather than the abuser, she would sob about how much pressure she was under at work, as well as at home where she had problems with her house, her sometimes violent boyfriend, and her ailing mother for whom she was caring. Each meeting led her to describe a new bunch of problems to the boss. Her litany of tribulations worked, since she had been doing such specialized one-of-a-kind work for him for over 15 years. After one of their talks, her tirades at the office would calm down for a short time, but then a week or two later, they would start up again.

From time to time, Alice tried to confront Cherise about her latest tirade, such as telling her to stop yelling at the front desk people—who did report to Alice—but Cherise wouldn't listen. "In-

stead she was real snippy," Alice said. "She would say, 'Okay, I will. Now get out.' And then she would do what she had always done. I was supposed to manage her, along with the rest of the office, but I didn't have the authority to fire her. So I felt really stuck in knowing what to do."

What Should Alice Do?

In Alice's place, what would you do and why? What do you think the outcomes of these different options would be? Here are some possibilities:

- Since just talking to Cherise yourself hasn't worked, get together all of the loan brokers in the office and go talk to her as a group, asking her to change.
- Tape record Cherise's tirades, so you have proof of what she has been doing to take to the company owner.
- Have a meeting with the loan brokers in which you tell them to not take Cherise's screaming fits personally because she is doing this with everyone.
- Bring several loan brokers with you to a meeting with the owner so they can help you present a case about Cherise's rants and mistreatment of the other employees.
- Learn how to process loans yourself so the loan brokers don't have to use Cherise to process their loans.
- Find an outside loan processor to handle the loan processing. Tell the company owner that you and the loan brokers would prefer an alternative and you think this will result in more effective operations and a better bottom line.
- Talk to the bankers Cherise has been dealing with to get documentation from them about how Cherise has been abusive to them.
- Other?

In this case, since reasoning with Cherise yourself hasn't worked, one strategy might be the strength-in-numbers approach in going to Cherise with other loan brokers to get her to control her abusive behavior. Then tell her you will go to the company owner if she doesn't stop, and do so if conditions don't improve. At the same time, having a meeting with the loan brokers to show them your

support might help with office morale while you are all trying to deal with this problem.

If you do go to the owner, take a more proactive approach to show the owner how serious the problem is and how he might resolve it. This might be particularly important in this case, since the owner has let the situation go on for years. Cherise has been getting away with this behavior for so long she feels she can trample on others in the office with impunity. So you have to make a convincing case in order to get the owner to change anything. Besides going to the owner as a group to describe the problem, you might tape some of Cherise's tirades to show how truly abusive her behavior has been.

It may not be practical for you to learn these specialized skills yourself, and doing such work might detract from your own responsibilities in managing the office. However, you might look for outside loan processors who could be replacements for Cherise so the owner doesn't feel he has to continue to depend on her to do the work.

So what did Alice actually do to resolve the problem? In her case, nature fortunately intervened, which completely changed the office dynamics. Ironically, one of Cherise's pit bulls pulled her middle finger out of joint, so she arrived at work with her finger in a straight-up locked position. As a result, she couldn't do her job, which required extensive writing and typing. After she left for several months to have corrective surgery, the company owner terminated her and found someone else to replace her. Even more ironically, despite her high salary and short hours, she sued the owner for ten years of overtime pay, claiming he overworked her because she wasn't paid for her lunch hours. Eventually, the case got settled. Of course, Alice and the loan brokers were just glad she was gone. Even so, as Alice pointed out, "The lawsuit at the end showed she wouldn't let go. Even when she was no longer in the company, she was still trying to control and intimidate."

Today's Take-Aways

- Sometimes the law of karma may really come to your aid and take care of a very difficult problem for you, though you can only hope and pray!

- ☑ If someone tries to be tough and intimidating, you may find that strength in numbers helps you to be tough and intimidating back.
- ☑ If there is a long-standing problem, you may need to stir up the standing waters to bring about change.
- ☑ If you have a go to a top boss or company owner about a long-term serious problem, you can be more persuasive if you don't just tell. Instead, bring others along and use demonstrations to show and tell.