

Marin Snapshot: Barbara Otis finds what works, and what doesn't

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NOVATO NATIVE Barbara Otis, 52, has spent her career resolving employment conflicts and helping companies establish more positive work environments. She has seen the same issues create office disharmony time and again. With a B.A. in business management from Dominican University, an M.A. in organizational development from the University of San Francisco and more than 20 years' experience, she decided to share her expertise in the book "101 Ways to Lose a Great Employee" (116 pages, self-published, \$12.95).

Q: What inspired you to write the book "101 Ways to Lose a Great Employee?"

A: Inattention to good management practices frequently results in devastating effects. The tips in the book are based on common sense; however, you would be surprised at how many leaders do not follow even the simplest courtesies in a work environment.

Q: What are the top ways to lose an employee?

A: Some of the worst ways employers drive employees away are by disrespecting and ignoring them. Lack of communication and clear directions can be costly and fosters a culture of ambiguity and confusion. Piling on the work to your best employees and letting the slackers keep slacking is what I call performance punishment.

Q: What are the most important things employers should keep in mind as they make decisions that affect employees?

A: People are human, we have feelings — nine times out of 10 when someone shares a story with me about a difficult interaction with their direct supervisor, it's always about how it made them feel. A quote from Maya Angelou (that is also in my book) sums it up perfectly: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Q: What are some of the worst things employees can do to drive their employers crazy?

A: I am actively researching this topic for another book. Don't ruin your first impression by being late to your job on a continuous basis. In addition, failure to take responsibility for your actions matched with blaming behavior will come across as dishonest, unreliable and complaining.

Q: What are the essential elements of a successful work dynamic?

A: It all starts with trust. I also believe in shared accountability. Last, but not least, camaraderie provides workers with a sense of belonging.

Q: What is your favorite thing about living in Novato?

A: Everything! It's a local hometown next to one of the largest and diverse multicultural regions in the United States. I couldn't wish for a better place to live.

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