Reducing Negativity in the Workplace

You may have heard the expression, "One bad apple spoils the whole barrel." Everybody's had to work with a negative person at one time or another. The temptation is to distance ourselves from them or look the other way. Unfortunately in the workplace, those are not realistic options. You can't always choose who you work with--but you can choose how to deal with their negative attitudes.

Why are negative people such a problem? They spread doom and gloom, and it's infectious. Hearing, "It'll never work" or, "They're trying to eliminate our jobs" tends to be upsetting after awhile. The bottom line is that people who never look on the bright side affect others, and before you know it, everybody's griping and complaining.

So what's a manager to do when faced with negative behavior? Here are four strategies you can start using today:

1. **Determine what you would like to see changed.**
   What type of behavior are you expecting the employee to exhibit? What do you want to see different, and is it even realistic? Are they capable of change?

   You've made your determinations, now you need to devise a plan for changing the behavior. What is it that you plan to do? Think about what you can do to help change the negative behavior.

2. **Involve the difficult person, or group, in the planning.**
   Make them a part of the process. You will have a better chance of acceptance if they have a stake in creating a solution. Ask them for their input. Good communication opens all kinds of doors. If they're afraid of change, it can help them to better understand it. Good communication can help in eliminating fears. Communicate what you're looking for. They may not even realize they're being negative.

3. **Set deadlines for improvement checks and progress reviews.**
   Setting deadlines serves to make employees accountable. Employees need to know that they'll be held accountable for changing their behavior, and having a set review date keeps their mind on what they need to do and when it will be assessed.

4. **Be willing to change yourself.**
   Sometimes the difficult behavior of others change when you change. Be positive, expect the best from your employees and let them deliver their best. Remember, employees pay attention to what you do and how you respond to problems.