

# Ways to identify and deal with potential poison pills

In our travels we occasionally come across business owners who are struggling to transform their business. There are many reasons for this but one which causes the most disruption is the "poison pill". While this term is often associated with takeover bids, it is also a great description of the sort of person in your business who actively seeks to undermine any efforts to change or transform.

A "poison pill" in this context is someone who, through their actions, causes damage to your transformation efforts, your business and the effectiveness of your team. Some businesses are lucky enough to have a team of people who want to improve the way they work. From time to time, we come across businesses that are home to a "poison pill". These people, who can be a staff member or partner:

- Actively and loudly criticise any and all efforts to transform
- Openly undermine the authority of the partners who want to change
- Seek to promote the status quo
- Are hostile towards other staff members, especially those who want change
- Can be rude and offensive towards clients; sometimes deliberately giving misleading advice
- Deliberately ignore new procedures and systems or criticise every aspect of a new process
- Occasionally, will deliberately sabotage a new procedure to prove it doesn't work
- Are very often subject matter, process or client experts

"Poison pills" make no positive contribution toward change; everyone and everything which promotes change in the business (including advisors and clients) will be criticised. "Poison pills" will not be reasoned with and are not open to negotiation - it's their way or else! They are not beyond using the threat of resignation or unfair dismissal to get their own way and because there is often no opportunity or willingness to listen to an alternative point of view, it makes them particularly dangerous for your business.

Dealing with a "poison pill" in your business is a challenge because you need to weigh up the loss of knowledge and income against unknown benefits. You may decide to just put up with the negativity or try and get the person to change. In our experience, endeavouring to convert your "poison pill" into an advocate of change is often a waste of time - the amount of time and energy needed is enormous. We have seen business owners who have tried only to have their efforts met with ridicule and criticism and get nowhere. Other staff may start leaving the business during this time believing "nothing is being done" and the problem just gets worse.

You can avoid "poison pills" in your business by using a rigorous recruitment process that uncovers a candidate's attitude toward change and requires thorough referencing checking. While this is not always foolproof - many "poison pills" will say and do all the right things during recruitment and probation - the more effort you put into your recruitment process will reduce the likelihood of you recruiting one into your business.

However, if you do happen to recruit a "poison pill", addressing the issue immediately will help you avoid the spread of poison in your business.

Poison pills see change as a negative outcome and it is rare that they will alter their perception. This is not resistance to change but an inherent belief that they are right. Dealing with the problem immediately before it impacts on your whole business will ensure you get your transformation back on track as quickly as possible.