

## *Strategies to Survive Among Lifeless & Negative People in the Workplace*

*Taken From “Do You Work with the Living Dead?”©  
By Desi Payne  
Chapter 3*



Do you want a strategy that works?

“The last of human freedoms is to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” Victor Frankl, Holocaust Survivor

So what should you do when you see a workplace zombie? Should you pull out your sharpest weapon, as they do on television, and hide behind the door? Definitely not!

Here’s an idea which could increase revenue in hospitals and clinics with mind-blowing results. They could open a department called “Zombie Health.” People with any of the negative traits previously listed would go in for an inoculation. The line would be long, so nurses would just line them up in the hallways. The “sweetness serum” would be injected, and the cured zombies would walk out being sweet nice people from then on. Okay, so maybe that’s a little too far. That scenario would never take place. Therefore, I want to give you five different strategies on how to deal with the living dead. Depending on the situation, you might have to use one, some, or all of them.

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### **#1 DON'T GO TO THEIR GRAVE**

In other words, don't descend to their level. Basically, that's what a negative person wants you to do, because misery loves company and negativity breeds negativity. They don't want to be the only ones griping, complaining, whining, bashing the boss, back-biting co-workers, or having a pity party. If you get sucked in, they will squeeze the life out of you; then you will be dragging yourself around as they are.

I want to make it clear that I'm not talking about the person who occasionally complains or vents. You must be very sensitive to know when to listen and when to walk away. Some people do have legitimate problems or concerns. You don't want to be heartless and not help when there is a definite need. However, I think you will be able to spot the type of people I'm referring to. I'm talking about the people who are so negative for no good reasons, and who will not change even if something good is staring them in the face.

As I mentioned before, my brother was a guard in a correctional facility and prison. He dealt with many violent, foul-mouthed, and mean people. I know many times he had to bite his lip when they had lipped off to him. It takes self-discipline not to descend to these people's level.

### **#2 UNDERSTAND THAT EVERYONE FUNCTIONS DIFFERENTLY**

I used to get so frustrated with people who didn't operate the way I did. It was years before I understood that you must communicate with people differently and have different expectations of people who don't have the psychological or genetic make-up you do. On the well-known DISC personality profile chart, I'm a very high D (Confident, competitive, emphasis on accomplishment and results, highly motivated). It's probably good I married someone who is the opposite, which is a high S (Steady, slow, and stable). My husband occasionally pulls the reins back on me every now and then.

It's taken some time, but now my expectations of others have changed, I'm more patient with people, and I try to go with the flow. If you understand that people don't operate the way you do, you'll give them more space, be more forgiving, and exercise greater patience with them.

Teddy Roosevelt said, "The most important single ingredient in the formula for success is knowing how to get along with people." I think that sums it up.

### **#3 STAY AWAY, HIDE, OR DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM THEM**

How many times has this happened to you? You go into the grocery store focusing on whether to grill hamburgers or make tacos, when suddenly you see the living dead dragging themselves through the store. It's the person from work who wants to talk incessantly about his or her complaints with the boss, co-workers, or

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workload. You quickly swerve your cart over to aisle eight and begin studying the back of a bag of dog food—and you don't even own a dog. Out of the corner of your eye you see him again and make your way to the front check-out, deciding you're going to order pizza for dinner.

I'm not saying we should be snooty in our dealings with others; I just believe your time is valuable. Why let someone waste your time and energy when you know from experience you cannot help him or her? You've heard of secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke causes numerous health problems to people who inhale smoke involuntarily. Well, secondhand negativity can also be inhaled by people involuntarily and cause numerous emotional problems. When you're at work and sitting next to people like this, I'm sure it would be obvious if you started wearing ear plugs or mega-sized ear phones. When possible, politely change the subject, honestly tell someone you need to get something finished, or maybe try to move to another area. During break time you may need to go for a healthy walk or simply shift locations for a while. Do what you can to take a break from these workplace zombies. Don't be drawn into negative discussions.

### **#4 BE AS GRACIOUS AS POSSIBLE**

Sometimes you have to kill problems with kindness. For ten years my husband and I had been house shopping. One day we pulled into the driveway of our dream house. We got out and fell in love with this house. We called our best friends, who lived a block away, to come over and see it. They walked around it with us. We peeked in the windows (it was empty); they asked us if we were going to buy it. We laughed and told them no, we couldn't afford it at this stage of our life; it was just a dream house. We thought it would be fun to look at it anyway.

After the realtor showed it to all of us, our friends asked us several times again over the next few days if we were going to buy it, and we said no. A few weeks later, our friends bought MY HOUSE! I turned into a zombie before the day was over. My rotten attitude was obvious, as I was upset that they bought OUR house. In reality, of course, it wasn't our house at all. Our friends even had told us they were interested in the house as well and thinking about buying it if we weren't. Still, the sting of my feelings was there. After I struggled with this over the next couple of weeks, I decided that there was a better house out there waiting for us and we would buy it at the right time.

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So what kindness could I show to them? I went out and bought a house-warming gift that I would want someone to buy me and took it to THEIR new home. It's very important to take action steps to help you overcome a zombie attitude. Your emotions and feelings will line up if you first take steps to change your attitude. Remember, it's a CHOICE and you make it.

My hairdresser is also a dental assistant (so she can brush just about anything). However, she recently left her dental job because the boss was not only demanding, but non-caring, rigid, sharp with her words, and downright mean. Staci, who is about the sweetest thing you ever met, needed to have her previous boss sign a form that she was no longer working at that dental practice. Staci took the paper to her and she refused to sign it. It would take maybe three seconds, but she wanted to make the process difficult. When Staci went home, she was very aggravated with the woman. She remembered reading a proverb which said, "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat." She decided to make her a pan of delicious brownies and then took the warm brownies to her. She had decided she didn't want to become infected by this zombie boss, so she decided to kill the zombie with kindness and be gracious to her. By the way, she chose not to add a secret ingredient like Minny did when she baked a pie for Hilly as seen in the movie *The Help*. (You'd understand if you saw the movie.)

An employee who used to work for me didn't show up for work one day. I called her and asked if there was a problem. She was short with me and gave me a lame excuse, so I reminded her how important it was to let me know if she couldn't work so that I could replace her. She said she would, and I didn't think about it again until a few days later. I was called into my boss's office because the employee called him and said that I was mean to her. Oh, brother! Boggled by her accusations, I decided to kill her with kindness by getting her a gift.

I knew she also worked another part-time job thirty minutes away, so I purchased a nice gift and drove it over to her. She was a receptionist and when I walked in and set it on her desk, her eyes got as big as saucers. I told her I wanted her to have a good day. Interestingly enough, she never showed back up for work again and quit. I think she had issues.

When I was teaching this topic at a conference, at the end of the session, a gentleman commented that he and those at his table discussed that they could not do this with certain individuals that they worked with. I replied, "I didn't say it was an easy thing to do." Looking back, I was probably gritting my teeth when I paid for the gift, took the time to drive it over to her, and looked her in the eyes. But when I left, I knew that I was not infected with the zombie virus. I knew that I had the choice to be consumed with her spiteful attitude or an attitude of joy. There is something about giving to others that will build you into a better person. Plus, you never know what might happen due to your act of kindness; maybe that person will think to do likewise to someone else down the road. Or maybe people will think

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about what they did to you and realize they were wrong. Or maybe they're like you and me, people who sometimes go through seasons of life that are rough and bumpy, hoping for someone to take the time to share kindness.

There will be times in life when you get thrown under the bus—people won't talk to you or treat you well. It's important to intentionally take action steps to help other people's negative attitudes and actions NOT show up in you. Remember to be gracious.

### **#5 INFECT PEOPLE WITH YOUR POSITIVE ATTITUDE**

Just as Zombie attitudes can be infectious, so also are the good. Honestly, I think the best way to deal with the living dead is to infect them with your enthusiasm and positive attitude. Be a Steady Eddy; remain cool, calm, and collected when negative situations arise. This book is primarily about zombies in the workplace, but I feel strongly that your personal life affects your professional life and your professional life affects your personal life. You can take your attitude from home to work, affecting your productivity, and vice versa.

Let's talk about the immediate family and close relatives who act like the living dead. You can't alienate yourself from your actual family. If you live in a negative atmosphere, then I advise you to talk to the family member involved. Under the negativity there is usually an underlying issue. It is important to address it, possibly even to the extent of receiving professional help. With all family members, you may have to hold your tongue so that the zombie doesn't get stirred up either in you or in them.

The bottom line is you need to LOVE those around you. In the long run, that may be what they need the most. If you remain a rock to them, they will turn to you for help. Think to yourself—how can I improve this situation? Focus on solutions even when you have the feeling, "This person will never change."

I have said that you should infect others with your enthusiasm and positive spirit. However, before I conclude this, I also need to say that life is not all rainbows, unicorns, and singing. There are times when you get in a slump or a funk. You may go through some type of tribulation or what I call a season of stress. I'm a pretty upbeat type of person and usually very positive, but let me tell you about the day I went to visit my chiropractor, Dr. Cosgrove. I had bummed up my neck, shoulder, ribs, hip, and ankles. I don't remember exactly how the conversation went, but I was hurting and, apparently, a cloud of negativity was rapidly forming around me. I was rattling on and on about negative situations in a negative manner.

Finally, during the adjustment period, Dr. Cosgrove said, "Can you tell me something positive?" I said, "In regard to what?" He replied, "I want to get you out of this mode that you're in; let's talk about something positive."

It caught me off guard, but did me good at the same time. It immediately showed me 1) that I had slipped into the living-dead mode without realizing it, and 2) what

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a great way to turn a negative conversation around. Negativity is toxic and can be contagious. Dr. Cosgrove was probably thinking, “I don’t want that negativity to infect me!” I’m so glad that he brought it to my attention and infected me with his positive attitude.

In summary, when you deal with the living dead and their Zombie Attitudes:

**First, don’t go to their grave. Don’t let them drag you down to their level.**

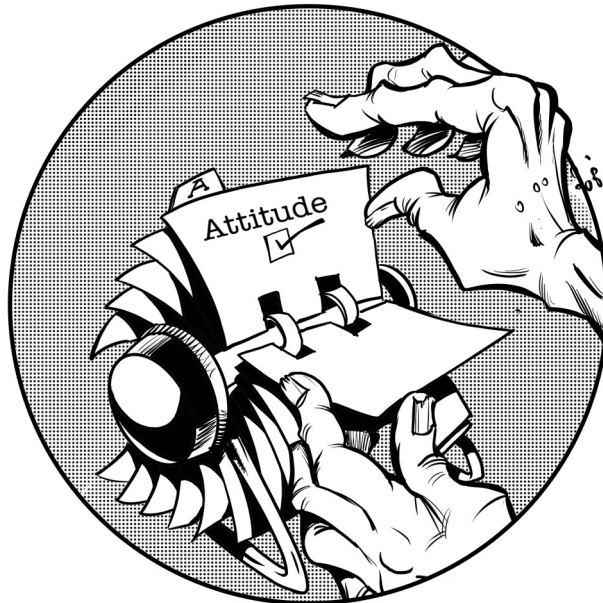
**Second, understand that everyone functions differently.**

**Third, stay away from them. Hide or distance yourself if necessary.**

**Fourth, remain as gracious as possible in your dealings with those around you.**

**Fifth, don’t get infected! Rather, you infect others with your positive attitude.**

Remember that you must intentionally take action steps to help you resist infectious negative attitudes.



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