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## 'Dementors' among Us: You Know Them. The Productive – But Morale-Killing – Employees.

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# 'DEMENTORS' AMONG US

You know them. The productive — but morale-killing — employees.

In my last columns, I focused on the light and dark sides of leaders, but employees also can have a dark side.

In fact, there is evidence that dark-side behaviors are increasing in the workplace, with 20 percent of those surveyed reporting being the target of workplace incivility at least once a week.

Based on conversations with managers and employees, professor Trey Denton and I are exploring incivility demonstrated by employees who are highly productive, but who destroy the morale of those around them.

Noting their similarity to the J. K. Rowling Dementor character, known for draining the happiness from others, we label these employees Dementors.

Workplace Dementors are

characterized by aggressive behavior that is generally verbal and attitudinal, rather than physically aggressive. Thus they are able to deny intent to harm others.

In fact, Dementors may not intend to harm others and may be unaware of the harm they cause. They may even view themselves as noble in standing for their principles. They rationalize any harm done to managers as deserved. Dementors attempt to enlist others to validate their belief system.

They display confidence, even narcissism, but they actually experience low self-esteem. Their low self-esteem propels them to seek positive feedback, but to recall it negatively, leading to high negative affectivity, seeing only the negative in themselves and others and viewing themselves as victims of their co-workers.

Their narcissistic tendencies imbue them with little ability to empathize with others and

monitor their behavior accordingly, so they continue to complain and resist authority, even when this is self-defeating.

They feel as if they are entitled to special treatment, which contributes to their distorted view that the organizational reward system grossly under rewards their high level of performance. Their response to such perceived mistreatment is typically passive aggressive.

Rowling's Dementor characters flourish in oppressive and dark places, as do workplace Dementors.

High-stress workplaces can actuate Dementor behavior when they are accompanied by a reward system that is truly unjust, by organizational norms that allow deviant behavior to persist and/or by a short-term management orientation focused only on immediate performance objectives.

Dementor behavior affects the attitudes and behaviors of those around them. Their

behavior can increase incivility as co-workers fight rudeness and cynicism with rudeness and cynicism. Job satisfaction and motivation decrease.

Top employees may even leave the organization in search of a healthier work environment. Therefore, it is incumbent upon managers to curtail Dementor behavior.

## Managing Dementors

A first step in managing Dementors is identifying them. All of us can have days when our bad attitude infects those around us, but Dementors always make one feel bad.

Once identified, it is important for Dementors to know that performance expectations include not only task performance but also civil treatment of co-workers.

Modeling expected behaviors for them and building an open and transparent organization negates Dementors'

ability to convince co-workers of the nefarious intentions of management.

Finally, in managing Dementors, it may become necessary to challenge them publicly. For example, when a Dementor makes an obliquely derogatory statement in a public forum, such as a meeting, it may be helpful to paraphrase the statement and ask them to reiterate their ownership of it.

Once we began talking about this topic, professor Denton and I were surprised by the number of affirmations we have had that workplace Dementors exist in all types of organizations and across all levels.

Further, we have found that their impact appears to be wide-ranging and deep.

Constance Campbell is a professor of management at Georgia Southern University and can be reached via email at [ccampbell@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ccampbell@georgiasouthern.edu).



Constance Campbell



Leigh Acevedo

TEDx is coming to Savannah. Affiliated with the renowned TED Conference,

TEDxCreativeCoast is a local self-organized, one-day event with the goal of re-creating the unique expertise found at the TED Conference.

Started 25 years ago, TED was originally based on bringing together people from technology, entertainment and

design but has since expanded broadly and now exists to promote "ideas worth spreading."

Past TED Conferences have presented the world's leading thinkers and doers, including Bill Gates, Al Gore, Jane Goodall, Sir Richard Branson, Malcolm Gladwell and Phillippe Starck.

Organized locally by Frank Spencer from KedgeForward, Jenn Taylor from Armstrong Atlantic State University and The Creative Coast Alliance, TEDxCreativeCoast is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. June

18 at Meddin Studios, 2315 Louisville Road.

Title sponsor The Creative Coast Alliance became involved in TEDxCreativeCoast because this event, and others like it, speaks to TCCA's greater vision for Savannah and Chatham County to be positioned as a place for creative energy, ideas and businesses as well as the economic center for the Creative Coast.

The theme for TEDxCreativeCoast is "Designing Creativity" in recognition that the Creative Coast is an area

ripe with business innovation, creativity, science, engineering and industry leadership.

Following TED's celebrated format, TEDxCreativeCoast will be a suite of short (18 minutes or less), carefully prepared talks, demonstrations and performances on a wide range of subjects. All of them will be related to the theme of the conference with the idea to foster learning, inspiration and wonder and to provoke conversations that matter.

Currently, TEDxCreativeCoast has limited spots available for brilliant, dynamic, innovative and engaging speakers to present their forward-thinking ideas and discuss their passions, visions and ideas for Savannah and the world.

She or he may be a student, teacher, designer, executive, doctor, military leader, academic scholar, author, chef, architect, musician, scientist or something completely different.

Presentations will be recorded and shared online at [www.tedxcreativecoast.com](http://www.tedxcreativecoast.com) and could appear on [www.TED.com](http://www.TED.com), the TED speaker's website, which has been viewed more than 100 million times worldwide.

## IF YOU GO

### What:

TEDxCreativeCoast, a local self-organized, one-day event featuring a suite of short, carefully prepared talks, demonstrations and performances on a wide range of subjects related to the theme "Designing Creativity. The goal is to foster learning, inspiration and wonder and to provoke conversations that matter.

**When:** 9 a.m.-5 p.m. June 18

**Where:** Meddin Studios, 2315 Louisville Road

### Want to be a speaker?

For more information about being a speaker at TEDxCreativeCoast, go to [www.tedxcreativecoast.com](http://www.tedxcreativecoast.com). Applications for speakers are due May 5.

**Information:** Go to [www.tedxcreativecoast.com](http://www.tedxcreativecoast.com).

Leigh Lawless Acevedo, the marketing and member services coordinator of The Creative Coast Alliance, can be reached at 912-447-9713 or [lacedo@thecreativecoast.org](mailto:lacedo@thecreativecoast.org).

# 'Designing creativity' theme of TED conference

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