



**Stop a bad day
becoming
progressively
worse...**



When it goes from bad to worse – crisis and complaint management in the workplace

We've all had bad days at work. For some it starts before you set foot in the office or log on to your early-morning Zoom call. You just feel 'off'. Maybe you ran out of milk for your must-have coffee, maybe you're nursing a bad night's sleep. Whatever it is, it seeps into your bones, and getting your day back on track becomes a task. You're snapping at colleagues, exhausted by midday and just feel frayed around the edges. Your day has gone from bad to worse.

Now if you're a one-man (or woman) band, your bad mood doesn't bug anyone but you. But if you're part of a bigger team? Well, discontent becomes contagious according to author of Primal Leadership Annie McKee: "Your negative emotions spread like wildfire", she says.

How to turn a bad day into a better one

So, in the interest of getting you out of your funk, and making sure your colleagues don't follow suit, here are some ideas that might help you turn a bad day around. Your bad day could be due to personal circumstances (and these tips may work for that too), but for now we're focusing on bad days in the workplace that could impact other employees, suppliers and your bottom line.

TIP #1

TO STOP A BAD DAY BECOMING WORSE

DON'T BLANKET THE ENTIRE DAY AS BAD

A tip from McKee is to pinpoint the 'what'. The entire day isn't bad, but 'something' is. Take time to think about what this is. Then, focus on the things you can either make go right (like replenishing the milk) or that have already gone right – a successful team brainstorm, a complimentary email from a client etc. Noting what's working in your favour can take you from bad mood to good before the day is done.

TIP #2

TO STOP A BAD DAY BECOMING WORSE

**BE REALISTIC ABOUT TURNING
THAT FROWN UPSIDE DOWN**

As the famous adage goes, “the best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time”. Some of the most common workplace crises that are bound to leave you in a bad mood include poor maintenance practices, human error and bad planning. And fixing crises in these areas can take time. So why not start with one immediately accomplishable action (start with one bite), followed by something that’s maybe more long term but that you can start planning for now (that’s another bite). Not only will you get a mood boost from the immediate-term action you’ve taken, but you’ll allay any future upset by having mapped out action steps to fully resolve the problem at hand.

The power of accomplishing something immediately, even if it seems small, can’t be overstated. Authors of *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*, Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer believe that these small ‘progress wins’ have the power to transform: “Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work.”

These same authors ran an after-work survey for roughly four months across various professions that garnered 12 000 responses, and found that an employee’s ‘good day’ was most often because they made progress on something, either alone or as part of a team. And a ‘bad day’? It’s easy to guess. Bad days were when setbacks happened. This is where taking even a small step towards achieving something or ticking a to-do off your list is worth it. Crises, setbacks and workplace complaints are bound to happen. But remembering you’re in control, and can start making progress towards resolving these, is a mood-changing move.

TIP #3

TO STOP A BAD DAY BECOMING WORSE

**REFLECT ON YOUR
PREVIOUS BAD DAYS AND
FIND SOME ANSWERS!**

If your bad day is consistency caused by running out of milk for your coffee, you can reflect pretty easily and realise you need to buy milk in bulk to prevent having a 'bad mood' repeat.

If we take this same basic principle, what other bad days can you reflect on where you can pinpoint not just the cause of the bad day (similar to tip one), but what you did or could have done to resolve it (similar to tip two)? This becomes extremely significant when workplace crises arise, and also forms the basis for your internal crisis communication plan as well as your escalation procedures.

We're not advocating wallowing in bad day flashbacks, but rather seeing them as lessons in learning – you can avoid unnecessary negative repeats and feel empowered. Taking those lessons and shaping them into formal policies also means you can flick to page five of a manual, as opposed to having to think back over five years of bad days and 'what did I dos' to arrive at a solution.

But what if you're dealing with situations that are backsliding from bad to worse, and you're not directly involved?

This is iLodge's bread and butter. When you're managing remote workforces, all housed in accommodation facilities in different parts of the country, on top of monitoring meals prepared by different Service Providers, and coordinating the busses and bakkies driven by different drivers, problems are bound to arise. Some are minor, like a request from a workforce to improve the DSTV package of their accommodation to get more sports channels (which iLodge did at no extra cost to the client), but others are far more complex.

Case Study #1

What happened at a glance

Between 2017 and 2018 there were attempted shutdowns at the Lethabo power station in the Free State as local residents demanded jobs. One of our clients had a remote workforce working at the Station and staying in accommodation nearby. Residents began threatening security personnel on the accommodation premises, disgruntled that their demands weren't being met and that this particular workforce were employed. This put them at obvious risk.

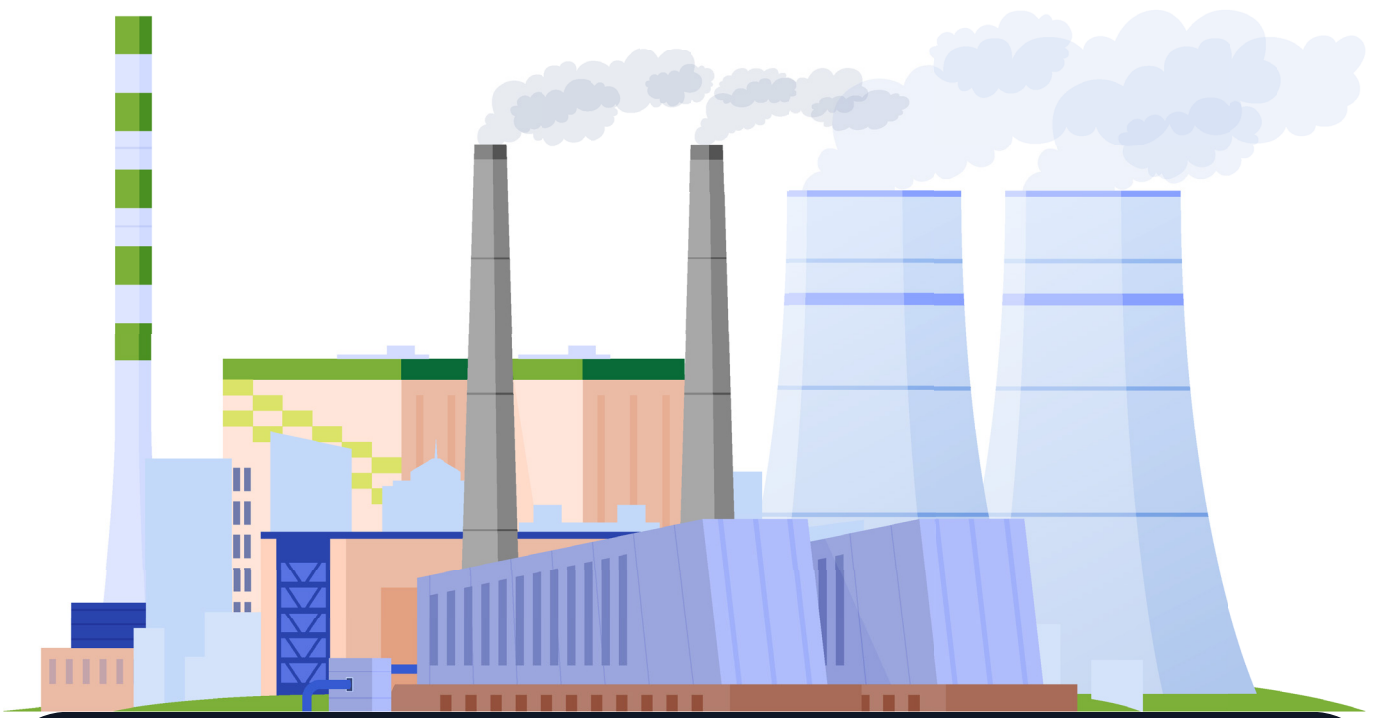
How we took it from bad to better

A situation like this is unpredictable, especially as tempers begin to flare. With tension mounting, groups of residents began targeting workforce accommodation in earnest, and we had to intervene.

Within 15 minutes of this event taking place, a local security company arrived at the premises and they in turn alerted the police. Arrangements were made to cordon off the street leading to the accommodation, and security vehicles not only patrolled the area but also escorted workforce transport between their accommodation and the Station.

The iLodge project manager at the time was hands-on, arriving to properly assess the situation and gauge its severity. The swift response time and clear show of security sent the right message to residents, and the unrest died down allowing work to continue as planned. Certain situations call for swift action, especially when lives are at risk. Having clear escalation procedures as an organisation, with 'graded' categories for certain events, can help you know when planning should take centre stage, or when taking action should.

This is when reflecting back on those bad days and similar crises really comes in handy. You're not scrambling to know what to do, who to contact and who has the authority to make the call.



Example #2

What happened at a glance

Between May and June 2021 there was an outage at Matla Power Station in Mpumalanga, and a workforce was dispatched to work on the problem. Unfortunately, this timeline also coincided with community protests over service delivery which meant roads blocked by burning tyres, on top of electricity and water cuts. The workforce was working 12-hour shifts at the Power Station and needed to not only be transported to and from their accommodation, but also receive three hot meals a day (on top of a hot shower).

How we took it from bad to better

A large part of iLodge's success is attributed to our connections to the community and the on-the-ground work we do with transport operators, accommodation owners and community leaders. In this situation we could have easily blanketed the project as 'bad' – too many things were going wrong and challenges were mounting from all sides. But focusing on what we could make go right – one action at a time – led to a ripple effect of problem-solving and positive outcomes for the client.

Our first step in this situation was to speak to taxi associations and leaders to request permission for the workforce to drive through the protest action. On top of this we requested that accommodation Service Providers keep additional provisions on hand – such as food stuffs and gas-burner stoves – to ensure the workforce was adequately fed. Staff at the accommodation facility were also requested to stay on the premises to ensure seamless preparation of meals, cleaning of rooms and more.

Generators were used to accommodate electricity cuts and ensure hot showers were had by all. We worked with the resources we had on hand in the immediate term, and were also able to plan longer term (and for the duration of the project), understanding the kinds of challenges we were up against.