



BUSINESS *digest*

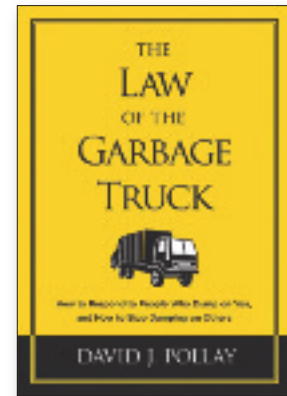
Beating Destructive Attitudes



3

POINT OF VIEW: *The Law of the Garbage Truck*

Based on *The Law of the Garbage Truck*, by **David J. POLLAY**, Sterling, October 2010.



6

JOB AID: A Manager's Duty: Create a "Zero Garbage Truck" Zone

Based on *The Law of the Garbage Truck*, by **David J. POLLAY**, Sterling, October 2010.



8

INTERVIEW: "No Garbage Trucks" at Carolina Seal: Bringing a Positive Mindset to Work

Interview with **Robert ALIOTA**, founder and CEO of Carolina Seal, Inc. U.S.A., May 2011.



In Brief

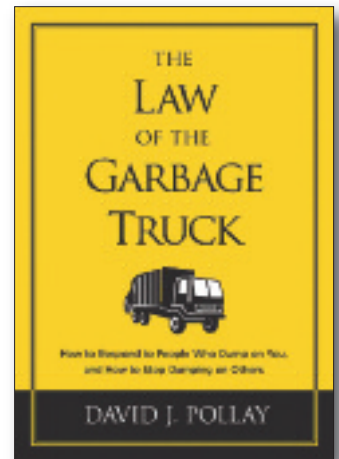
Allowing others to push you into dealing with their resentments and negative emotions is tantamount to turning yourself into a garbage dump. This in any case is the surprising, but vivid and insightful suggestion of blogger David J. Pollay. Such "garbage trucks" are everywhere, dumping their negative energy on others, to the detriment of collective performance.

The trick is to find the right attitude to avoid these garbage trucks ... and avoid becoming one yourself. What do you need to keep bearers of negative energy from interfering with the operations of a team? Collective brainstorming, collaboration, listening, and feedback are all useful ways to maintain the trust that keeps the troops united.

Carolina Seal's Robert Aliota decided to eradicate the risk of harm presented by a negative state of mind. Having experienced garbage trucks in a previous professional incarnation, he knows the harm they can do. Without questioning the right to criticize, he refuses to allow negative attitudes to wreak havoc.

The Law of the Garbage Truck

Based on *The Law of the Garbage Truck: How to Respond to People Who Dump on You, and How to Stop Dumping on Others* by **David J. POLLAY**, Sterling, October 2010.



“A wise man is above all the insults that may be said to him, and the great response that one must make to outrages is moderation and patience,” wrote Molière¹. **A precept that is often difficult to keep up in the sometimes tense atmosphere of the workplace. And yet, David Pollay emphasizes, strategically the management of those he calls “garbage trucks”—individuals who are charged with negative energy that they unload on others, thus affecting collective performance—is very important.**

In 2007, Robert Sutton called them “assholes”²; in 2011, David Pollay prefers to call them “garbage trucks.” These are the “harmful” folks who seem to take a perverse pleasure in dumping their frustrations, anxieties, and anger on everyone around them. There are a lot of them around! Indeed, according to a study by Christine Pearson and Christine Porath³, 96 percent of individuals say that they have been the victims of incivility at the workplace, half of them more than once a week, and almost two out of three people suffer pathological stress due to acts of incivility. The problem is

not just moral, it is also economic: the impact of garbage trucks on employee engagement is totally negative. According to Pearson and Porath, American companies lose 300 million dollars a year in this way. Cisco Systems alone has estimated its annual lost revenue due to incivility at 8 million dollars! But garbage trucks can be avoided. Each person can fight against their harmful effects in their own way ... and avoid becoming one themselves.

LET GARBAGE TRUCKS PASS!

A colleague who constantly puts down what you do, a manager who pushes you constantly without the slightest sign of recognition, a truly odious customer ... In the workplace, garbage trucks are everywhere. And our instinctive reaction—to do whatever we can to take it all in stride—is often inappropriate.

MEMO

- **8 million dollars:** this is how much incivility costs Cisco Systems every year, according to an internal evaluation.
- **To put a stop to this waste:** 1) Stop absorbing the garbage of others; 2) Learn not to dump your resentments on those around you.
- **Create “garbage-free” zones:** spaces that are protected against harmful behavior, without creating barriers to debate on ideas.

■ Saving Energy

“Any energy spent processing the original garbage truck experience is too much energy diverted from what’s important in your life” explains David Pollay, citing a range of scientific studies as he warns of the psychological and physical costs of responding to garbage trucks in any way: notably anxiety, fatigue, and high blood pressure. In short, allowing a garbage truck to strew its contents over you makes you less efficient, less happy, and less healthy!

In the moment...

- Resist the desire to fight for your ego.
- Congratulate yourself every time that you decide to ignore a garbage truck instead of responding in kind.

Later...

- Take stock of what is really important to you: this is the objective that you need to keep in mind when a garbage truck tries to dump its contents on you.
- Identify the recurring situations that put you on the defensive and observe your way of managing them. Pick out one where you can just “let the garbage truck pass” without reacting.

Concentrate on What Can Be Controlled

Thus, the best behavior to adopt is not to “digest” the garbage of others, but to make it so that it does not get to you in the first place, so you can invest as much energy as possible in whatever can really be controlled. Pollay draws on his own professional experience to illustrate the legitimacy of this principle: in 1997, charged with the task of shutting down the Global Payment Systems customer service center that he had just been appointed to lead, he had to deliver the bad news to his team. He chose the path of honesty, explaining to them that executives expected a drastic drop in productivity after the announcement and emphasizing the fact that each employee had the opportunity to show the best in themselves under these difficult circumstances by remaining focused on their mission. While the call center did indeed close four months later, the agents maintained their engagement up until the very last, and virtually all of them moved on to a new job immediately. Pollay’s handling of this misadventure caught the attention of Yahoo!, which entrusted him with the leadership of its brand-new customer service department a few months later.

The Author

A journalist, blogger, and business lecturer, David J. POLLAY began his career at Mastercard, Global Payments Systems, and within AIESEC before joining the executive team at Yahoo!, taking the reins of customer service. After earning a degree in positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, he founded The Momentum Project, LCC, an organization dedicated to the applications of positive psychology in the business world.



DON'T FILL UP YOUR OWN DUMPSTER!

“Other people are not the only ones who bring garbage into our lives – we create plenty of our own negativity that stirs memories of our past and makes us fearful of what we imagine awaits us in the future.”

■ Not Darkening Your Memories

Roy Baumeister, a psychology researcher at Florida State University, has discovered that the human brain stocks negative impressions more easily than pleasant moments and brings them to the surface more frequently. Even worse, every time you return to a bad memory, you reinforce its harmful power. Your past misadventures are thus darkened every time you think back to them. And each of the contexts in which unpleasant memories arise is codified as “dangerous” by our internal defense mechanisms, which leads them to send up ever more warning signals ... and often puts us on the defensive. The challenge, when a bad memory arises, is to do our best to analyze it from a neutral and objective point of view, stripping it of its negative power.

■ Not Creating Future Dumpsters

While the past dumpster is harmful, the future dumpster is no better! “It is important to be prepared for what could happen. But ruminating about the possible arrival of a garbage truck never helps us accomplish anything.” Nor does it prevent feared events from happening.

In the moment...

- When you are attacked by anxiety about the uncertain future, concentrate on your action plan and remain optimistic.

Later...

- Create your own ACP (Action Continuity Plan): put words to the things that frighten you, list all the concrete actions that will allow you to be prepared, and thus keep your mind free to remain concentrated on the present. ...

Quiz : Do You Have a Tendency to Dump on Others?

Score the following statements on a scale of 0 to 4

0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = from time to time, 3 = regularly, 4 = all the time

- When I make a mistake, it isn't my fault
- When someone asks me a question, I go on the defensive
- When somebody annoys me, then others suffer the consequences
- When I have a personal or professional problem, my colleagues feel the impact
- I bark at other people
- I expect others to always forgive my mistakes
- I tell negative stories about myself or others
- I prefer to criticize rather than making positive comments
- I seek revenge for even the smallest offenses
- When I am not satisfied with someone else, I let others know before telling the person directly

From 0 to 12: Congratulations, you don't dump on others. Your relationship to others is calm, you can concentrate on what's important to you and you help others to do the same.

From 13 to 20: You tend to weigh others down with your own resentments. By allowing more garbage trucks to pass you could improve your relationships with those around you.

More than 21: You are a potential garbage truck! Learn not to fill your own bin so as not to dump it on others using the eight golden rules of civility.

... “I do not accept garbage in my life. When I see garbage trucks, I do not take them personally. I smile. I wave. I wish them well. And I move on. And I do not spread garbage to others. I am not a garbage truck.” Simple as it may be, this engagement can durably change your relationship to others and your way of managing events, and make you more efficient. With a sound methodology (see the FICHE PRATIQUE “Duties of the manager: Create a ‘Zero Garbage Truck’ Zone” on the next page), it can also help you orient yourself day-to-day as a manager and free your teams from the grips of garbage trucks. ■

1. In *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* [The Bourgeois Gentleman], first performed in 1670.

2. See the dossier “NO Bullying in the Workplace!”, *Business Digest* no. 179, November 2007.

3. *The Cost of Bad Behavior*, Christine Pearson and Christine Porath, Portfolio, July 2009.

Eight Golden Rules to Avoid Turning Into a Garbage Truck

“When our load of frustrations, anger, disappointments, anxiety, and bitterness becomes too heavy, we do like dump trucks do: we spread our contents around! But this can be avoided. We don't have to dump on others...”

1. Scrupulously follow all the basic rules of politeness (hello, goodbye, please, thank you, etc.) with everyone in your environment, whatever your feelings toward them.
2. Do not respond to aggression with aggression.
3. Do not mull over your grievances: they will nourish a latent aggression that could explode on the slightest reason.
4. Know how to ask for help without becoming a burden for others.
5. Express yourself but don't dump on others.
6. Ask for permission before talking about your problems to someone else.
7. Before complaining or criticizing, ask yourself if it will move the situation forward.
8. Don't let yourself be drawn into sterile conversations about the failings of others.



There will always be garbage trucks... As an individual you can prevent them from affecting you. As a manager, you have to make sure that they don't cause problems for your teams! Pollay's proposed solution: create a "zero garbage truck" zone.

A Manager's Duty: Create a "Zero Garbage Truck" Zone

Based on *The Law of the Garbage Truck: How to Respond to People who Dump on You, and How to Stop Dumping on Others* by David J. POLLAY, Sterling, October 2010.

1 TEAMWORK

You want to improve the atmosphere in your team, find a solution to internal conflicts (bullying, chronic arguments) or help them to confront external garbage trucks (customers, other teams, etc.)? Start by inviting your colleagues to participate in the process!

- Use a meeting to present the concept of a garbage truck, and emphasize the fact that no one is obliged to accept another person's garbage or doomed to dump their resentments on other people;
- Ask each member of your team to describe the situations where they feel like victims of garbage trucks and where,

as the case may be, they find themselves acting as garbage trucks themselves;

- Collectively define the limits between acceptable and unacceptable;
- Demonstrate the difference between the natural need to share one's difficulties and the temptation to transfer one's whole burden of anguish, anger, or frustration onto colleagues. Emphasize rules of occasional "bag emptying" (after requesting permission, for a brief time);
- Review the most frequent garbage truck attack scenarios (customers, discontented partners, etc.) and collabo- ...

The Three to One Rule

In their research psychologists Barbara Fredrickson and Marcial Losada have discovered that by asking the members of a team to maintain a ratio of three positive or constructive comments to one negative comment in all interactions, the performance of the whole team is optimized, whether it is in terms of profitability, customer relations, or corporate evaluations.

... ratively draw up a set of model responses aimed at allowing your colleagues to let the danger pass by to remain focused on their objectives.

2 THE "ZERO GARBAGE TRUCK" ONE REALITY TEST

The involvement of all members of your team allows you to collectively put Pollay's theory into practice and ensures everyone's support.

- **Step 1:** Based on your joint discussions, create a "zero garbage truck" policy and submit it to your team. Formalize expectations in a clear fashion and make sure that everyone understands them.
- **Step 2:** As a manager, your duty to set an example is fundamental. Strive to follow the rules to the letter under all circumstances;
- **Step 3:** Check in regularly about the policy in team meetings, emphasizing progress made and openly discussing points where improvement is still needed;
- **Step 4:** If a member of your team has difficulty meeting the commitments of the policy, analyze the situation neutrally at a calm moment, and offer help (training, coaching) if necessary.

3 RETHINK COLLECTIVE COMMUNICATION: THE ART OF DEBATE

The creation of a zero garbage truck zone does not mean the end of debates on ideas within your team. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to set rules for them and thereby make them more productive:

- Discussion must always remain centered on the topic of debate, which is formally defined in advanced;
- All opinions are welcome, including the most clear-cut;
- Attacking someone's ideas is allowed, but attacking the person never is;
- Each person can express themselves as they see fit (in other words, those who need to get worked up to express their ideas can do so), as long as the rules of civility are scrupulously followed.

4 MASTER THE ART OF FEEDBACK

The creation of a "zero garbage truck" zone requires offering individual guidance to each member of your team! Keep an eye on your team all the time, and congratulate them or encourage them to get more engaged using regular feedback.

- Always ask for permission to give your feedback. It will always be granted, and the fact of having asked offers the person you are talking to a "transition zone" for preparation: they will be all the more concentrated on what you have to say for it.
- Start systematically by recalling what you expect from the person on both operational and behavioral levels;
- Describe the current situation objectively, making sure to contextualize what you say as much as possible and stick to verifiable facts;
- Put the situation in perspective and show how improving it is important for your team, with respect to company strategy and in the person's own interest. ■

Five Rules for Dealing With a Stubborn Garbage Truck Colleague

1. Never respond to aggression with aggression, even if it can be a relief.
2. Do not act as though nothing had happened.
3. Suggest a meeting "on neutral ground" to straighten things out.
4. Prepare for a negotiation, not for a fight: the objective is for the two sides to come out of the discussion "on a high note."
5. If the situation gets out of your control or if it becomes a long-term pattern, appeal to a third party for help: your supervisor or a manager who has operational power over your garbage truck colleague.

“No Garbage Trucks” at Carolina Seal: Bringing a Positive Mindset to Work

Interview with **Robert ALIOTA**, founder and CEO of Carolina Seal, Inc. U.S.A., May 2011.

When Robert Aliota decided to bring David J. Pollay’s “The Law of the Garbage Truck” initiative to his company, he made sure it was a voluntary collective effort, which involved not only staff but also their families and business partners, because it is more than a step to boost business—it’s about doing the right thing.

BIOGRAPHY



After graduating from the North Carolina State University College of Management in 1989, **Robert ALIOTA** worked for 4 years at ADP, one of the largest payroll processing companies in the U.S.A. He was then recruited into the hardware and software arena and sold hubs, routers and switches in the computer networking industry for the next few years. In 1995, at the age of 29, he decided to go the entrepreneurial way and started his own industrial distribution company, Carolina Seal, from his garage. His business, which is specialized in engineered rubber, plastic, metal and foam parts, has grown into a 19-employee company, now operating out of their own 20,000 square foot distribution facility.

Somehow, it was only natural that Robert Aliota apply David J. Pollay’s “The Law of the Garbage Truck” to his own company. After all, his personal and professional philosophy happens to be pretty similar to the central tenet of this positive psychology initiative: focusing on the positive, and on what you can control. Or, to use Pollay’s very visual—and therefore impactful—original metaphor: letting the “garbage” (anger, frustration and other negative emotions) pass you by in order to concentrate on what is important.

The Trigger: Experiencing Unfairness

While he was still working in the corporate / computer networking world, Robert Aliota realized how little control he has over its own destiny no matter if he works crazy long hours and chalk up millions in sales. « I had worked for several months

to close a \$2.2 million government-related sale, with the strong support and help of my entire inside sales team. Due to internal politics, jealousies and rivalries within this particular organization, my inside sales team was not given the recognition, credit or financial rewards for this sale, even though I was being paid my full commission as the Regional Sales Manager. Due to this severe injustice, I spoke up and made it clear to management how unfair I felt this was... I evidently ruffled the wrong feathers by doing so and was ‘let go’ within the next couple of months or so. Ironically, this was only a month or two after I had just completed a year of selling over \$10 million in hardware and software. I had also recently just been one of only a very select group of people in the company that had been awarded stock options by the owners... but I still lost my job for

speaking up for people who had helped me so much.” This triggered Robert Aliota’s determination to start his own business and create a culture that focuses on developing the employees, celebrating excellence and passionately caring for customers. And so over the following decade, Carolina Seal grew from a tiny business operated out of a garage with two plastic shelves and a box of business cards into a 19-employee enterprise with manufacturing partners all over the world.

Birth of a “No Garbage Trucks! Zone” at Carolina Seal

Around 2004, David J. Pollay, who had been in Robert Aliota’s network for years, became a coach of his, discussing how to best utilize his strengths to improve business. The entrepreneur really appreciated the merits of positive psy- ...

... chology as a formal approach. “I realized that these ideas could be developed in business and brought significant returns, both personal and professional, for everyone,” he says. In particular, “The Law of The Garbage Truck serves as a reminder to us all to keep the garbage out of our business and focus on the important things... like taking care of one another... and our customers!” This is most important because the only way to deliver value over a long horizon of time is to be willing to adjust the business model to the ever-changing needs of cus-

tomers. Eventually he had David J. Pollay come in to lead a training seminar with the staff of Carolina Seal, to which close friends, family and members of his professional network also were invited. “It was a fabulous experience,” Robert Aliota recalls. “Some training is more than sales and product training, it’s life training, and it’s a part of your responsibility if you care about your employees.”

“The common language of the ‘The Law of the Garbage Truck’ softens tensions; if people don’t see eye-to-eye, they throw out the phrase ‘hey, don’t dump on me!’”

tomers. Eventually he had David J. Pollay come in to lead a training seminar with the staff of Carolina Seal, to which close friends, family and members of his professional network also were invited. “It was a fabulous experience,” Robert Aliota recalls. “Some training is more than sales and product training, it’s life training, and it’s a part of your responsibility if you care about your employees.”

The Voluntary Pledge

The way Robert Aliota introduced the Law of the Garbage Truck to Carolina Seal indeed shows his personal touch. He bought copies of Pollay’s book and gave one to each employee as a gift, pointing out they should see it not as mandatory reading but as “brain food.” Again, to simply expose everyone to the message, he brought his staff into the conference room and they watched the training videos. “Managers tend to get caught in the day-to-day stuff, because we have to work work work, so it was a nice change of pace to sit down together and talk

about how to interact, instead of discussing dollars and cents,” remembers Robert Aliota. Then he handed out printouts of the “8 Commitments of The Law of the Garbage Truck” and of the poster with the “No Garbage Trucks! Zone” drawing, not as a requirement, but as a statement each was free to make their own – reflecting the idea that each has a choice of which attitude to adopt at work. “In the next day or two, the posters came up on people’s office walls and it was good to see everybody was on the same page,” says the CEO.

A Common Language

Indeed, that’s what the Garbage Truck metaphor became: a baseline to go back to. “Without wanting to overanalyze, I

think it’s important to have a structure to how you think, a reference to say ‘I want to be reasonable’.” And one scenario that occurred multiple times, as recounted by Robert Aliota, is that of a challenging conversation with a supplier, or between co-workers. “The common language of the ‘The Law of the Garbage Truck’ softens tensions; if people don’t see eye-to-eye, they throw out the phrase ‘hey, don’t dump on me!’ thus both bringing awareness and lightening the mood.” Indeed, one of the strengths of a workforce with complementary sets of skills is that different perspectives brings about creative problem-solving; yet with diversity come tensions, and the “No Garbage Trucks!” policy was a purposeful decision to help promote a culture of tolerance and mutual respect. And the CEO of Carolina Seal can see that common language as an asset for Carolina Seal’s international expansion, to focus on what is important, “regardless of ethnicity or culture.” This is very important because to offer our customers a turnkey approach to securing the best parts, from the best plants, for the best price we work with world class manufacturing partners in over 27 countries. ■

When Is It Relevant To Voice Negative Feelings?

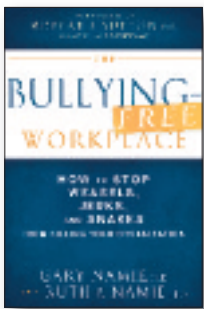
The “no garbage” commitment is about refusing to dump negativity, anger, resentment on others and not accepting such “garbage” to be dumped on oneself. In short, it’s about refusing an attitude destructive to both the dumper and the recipient—but expressed in such a visual way that it is easy to adopt. Does that mean trying to smile problems away or never expressing criticism? Not at all. As Robert Aliota points out, dumping is to be avoided, but constructive criticism is welcomed: “It’s an improvement if people air their true feelings, speak up in order to make progress. While at times it’s necessary to be firm on certain decisions, it’s important to encourage a culture in which everyone can give their input and be involved.” In short, he preaches for a collaborative management style, one that strives to make the workplace more respectful. Yet it can only succeed if leaders sincerely embraces the “No Garbage Trucks!” message. “It’s a very personal thing, that starts from the top, and is definitely made for certain mindsets; for a ruthless, greedy or self-centered person, it’s not going to be of any interest.” To any company interested in applying these principles, he would recommend assessing the corporate culture, then bringing the author of the *The Law of the Garbage Truck*, David J. Pollay for training.

READ IT AGAIN IN *BUSINESS DIGEST*■ **NO BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE!**

Who are the tyrants in the workplace, what damage can they do? Based on the book by Robert Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule* (Vuibert, 2007), and the interview with Philippe Peyresaubes, SuccessFactors' Regional Director for France, Spain, and Italy, and Robert Care, CEO, Arup Australasia (Australia). *Business Digest* no. 179, November 2007.

■ **MANŒUVRES ET COMBINES NUISIBLES : HALTE AUX STRATAGÈMES PERSONNELS NÉFASTES POUR L'ORGANISATION**

What can be done to uncover and put a stop to vicious strategic games? Based on *Games at Work*, by Mauricio Goldstein and Philip Read, Jossey-Bass, April 2009, and the interviews of Eric Poll, founder, OrgInt (Switzerland), and Ney Mauro Simone da Silva, head of human resources, Camargo Corrêa—Engineering & Construction (Brazil), July 2009. *Business Digest* no. 198, July-August 2009.



THE BULLYING-FREE WORKPLACE: How to Stop Jerks, Weasels, and Snakes from Killing your Organization

By Gary and Ruth Namie, Wiley, mai 2011.

Nearly 14 million adults in the United States undergo intimidation daily in their workplace, and millions of others witness these kinds of actions all the time. However, most companies do absolutely nothing to fight these behaviors, or even worse, encourage them with practices that encourage management through fear (command & control, abuses of power, constant reporting, etc.). The results: burnout, high turnover, lack of engagement ... in short, psychological violence causes a great deal of damage, particularly at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid. How can you create a working environment that stops tin-pan tyrants in their tracks? In *The Bullying-Free Workplace*, Gary and Ruth Namie, consultants and founders of the Work Doctor consulting firm, offer a simple guide to putting an end to these harmful behaviors in your company and restoring a calm—and productive!—workplace atmosphere.



THE GREAT WORKPLACE: Building Trust and Inspiring Performance

By Michael Burchell and Jennifer Robin, Jossey-Bass, January 2011.

What do PepsiCo, FedEx, SC Johnson, Google and Microsoft have in common? They regularly top the Great Place to Work rankings... and they are leading companies in their respective industries. What do they have that other companies don't to deserve such recognition from their employees? How can other companies draw inspiration from their practices? Some answers from Michael Burchell and Jennifer Robin of the Great Place to Work Institute, who give an overview of the five dimensions of workplace well-being—credibility of management; respect for employees; fair treatment for all; pride in doing one's job; and camaraderie in teamwork—and illustrate them each with good practices that are just waiting to be imitated in your company.



ON THE WEB

The web site for *The Law of the Garbage*

Truck <http://bewareofgarbagetrucks.com/>

On the web site for *The Law of the Garbage Truck* you will find a selection of relevant resources (video interviews, blog posts, etc.). Notably, Pollay had the eight commandments for the “zero garbage truck zone” translated into a dozen languages—why not print them and display them prominently on the walls of your office right now?