

How To Spot Sludge in the Workplace

Sludge is any negative language in the workplace that is used to cast judgment, place guilt or add stress. It can also manifest itself in the things you say in response to peer pressure or the guilty feelings you may have about the way you choose to do your job. These are some common examples:

Timeclock Sludge: Any comment suggesting that the hours you are not present in the workplace are an indication of a lack of effort, performance or dedication.

- Example: “It’s 10:00 and you’re just getting in? I wish I had your job.”
- Example: “Leaving kind of early aren’t you?”
- Example: “Wow, that was a really long lunch break! Maybe keep it to 30 minutes next time.”
- Example: “Those people who work from home are not really working.”

Sludge Through Justification: A natural response for anyone on the receiving end of Sludge. You feel a need to respond to Sludge and end up creating more of it!

- Sludge: “It’s 10:00 and you’re just getting in?”
- Sludge Through Justification: “I know, but I was online at home this morning for three hours before I came in.”

Self Sludge: Telling lies or making excuses about how you spend your time from 8-5 Monday through Friday in anticipation of getting Sludged. Remember, it does not matter why you are leaving the office, where you are going, or when you will return. The only thing that matters is that your work is getting done.

- Example: “I will be leaving early tomorrow because I have a doctor’s appointment at 2pm.”
- Example: “I know gam is kind of late to be getting to work but traffic was really bad today.”

Sludge Eradication

The key is to turn the focus of these conversations toward business results and away from Sludge-based measures of performance such as individual work habits and the amount of time spent at the office. Redirect to the work, to the deliverables, and to setting clear expectations with the person Sludging you.

Common Sludge Eradication Responses:

- “How can I help you?”
- “Is there something I can do for you now?”
- “Was there something you needed me to do?”
- “Was there something you didn’t get from me?”
- “Did you try calling or e-mailing me when you saw I wasn’t at my desk?”