

Strengths-based Management: Strategies for Managing “Drainers”



All jobs come with a mix of responsibilities—some we enjoy, others we don’t mind, and still others we find exhausting. When we work on a task we find draining, we tend to be less efficient, effective, and engaged than someone who finds the task energizing. These “drainers” also deplete our energy and motivation for working on other tasks. This job aid can help sexual and reproductive health agency managers guide staff in constructively and consistently managing tasks they find draining.

DIRECTIONS: Walk through the steps below together with your team. Ask staff members to use the worksheet that follows to manage drainers over time.

STEP 1: Identify Drainers

To begin, encourage staff members to keep an [Energy Board](#) for 7 to 10 work days. When you notice several drainers on the Energy Board, move to Step 2.

STEP 2: Consider Options

Review the drainers on the Energy Board, and work as a team to identify which drainer to address first. Walk your team through the following questions about the drainer and record their responses on the worksheet below. “Yes” answers signal an option for handling the draining task differently. If the answer is “No,” move to the next question.

1. Can you stop doing this task?

It’s surprising how much time we spend on tasks that carry over from a previous project or initiative—and that no longer need doing!

2. Can you fix or change the process so the task is less draining?

How often do we tolerate an inefficient process simply because we assume it can’t be changed? Even adjusting *where* or *with whom* a task gets done can make it feel less draining.

3. Can you delegate this task, trade it with a peer, or outsource it?

We might feel guilty or embarrassed asking someone else to do a task just because we dislike doing it. But here’s the secret: Someone else may *enjoy* the very task we dislike! It never hurts to ask.

4. *Can you reframe the task? That is, can you change the way you think about it?*

The more we tell ourselves we dislike something, the more our minds believe it. Alternatively, reframing the task as helping us do something we enjoy—such as learning a new skill, meeting new people, or helping clients get the resources they need—can improve how we experience the task.

5. *Can you learn something new?*

Similar to reframing, we can improve our experience with a task by understanding it better. It helps to ask ourselves: “Why is this needed? How did we do this before? When did we start doing things this way? Who benefits from what I’m doing? What would happen if I didn’t do this? Who would I talk to if I wanted to suggest improvements?”

6. *Own it. Embrace the yuck!*

If you can’t find a way to make the task less draining, embrace it. Break the task into smaller chunks; take breaks; listen to music; do an energizing task or activity before and/or after the draining task; or set small goals, e.g., “Let’s see how many condom packets I can fill in 20 minutes!” If all else fails, chocolate always helps!

STEP 3: Translate Ideas Into Action

Now that your team has considered strategies for handling tasks differently, encourage them to use the worksheet to think through ways to manage additional drainers. Encourage staff members to work in groups of two or more.

Managers can revisit these strategies over time, and can:

- Meet one-on-one or as a team to discuss staff members’ experiences and ideas.
- Discover opportunities for task swapping, where one team member is energized by tasks another finds draining.
- Consider alternating staff assignments for those tasks that all team members find draining or collaborating to identify ways to make a universally draining task more fun (e.g., completing a task together rather than alone; celebrating progress made on a drainer).

ACTIVITY I FIND DRAINING:

