

Dealing with Difficult People: Working with YOU is Killing ME!

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Most of us have had to deal with a DIFFICULT PERSON at some time in our lives.

Facts about Dealing with Difficult People

- There is no magic wand....
- It's not about you – it's about THEM!
 - The behaviors difficult people exhibit are a reflection of their inner state.
 - People who are bored, unhappy, insecure, unmotivated, immature and/or incompetent try to take others down with them - to wallow in THEIR misery.
- Difficult People have a CHOICE in how they behave
- Difficult People are Reinforced for Being Difficult!
 - Difficult people don't become difficult overnight
 - They are difficult because they have years of "success" in getting their way
 - Our job is to break the cycle (think two-year- old temper tantrums.....)
- Difficult People treat EVERYONE badly.
 - So, we need to STOP taking their behavior personally!

We have FOUR choices in how we deal with difficult people

- You Can Stay and Do Nothing
Suffering in silence
 - This does NOT solve the problem and your frustration will almost always build up and get worse over time.**Complaining to someone who can do nothing about your problem person**
 - This is an equally bad solution as it tends to lower moral and productivity, while postponing an effective solution.
- You can vote with your feet
 - Not all situations are resolvable.
 - Some are not WORTH resolving.
 - Voting with your feet MAKES SENSE when it no longer makes sense to continue to deal with the difficult person.
 - If you are at risk of losing control; walk away

- You can change your attitude about the difficult person
 - You can learn to look at, listen to, and feel about your difficult person differently
 - This change in attitude will set you free from your reactions to their behavior
 - You **MUST** change your own attitude to find the courage and flexibility to move on to the fourth way to deal with difficult people.
- You can change your behavior.
 - You can't control the behavior of others. You can only control your response to them

THE DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Task Focused
Passive

People Focused
Aggressive

TASK FOCUSED

INTENT:

To get things done
To get things done right

PEOPLE FOCUSED:

INTENT:

To get along
To get appreciated



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN INTENT IS NOT MET?

Get it Done People become more Controlling

Try to take over and push ahead

Get it Right People become more Perfectionistic

Finding every flaw and potential error

Get Along People become Approval Seeking

Sacrificing personal goals to please others

Get Appreciated People become Attention Getting

Trying to force others to notice them

CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR (Add your notes here)

CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR

1. Dump the Victim Mentality

- Whining is not a substitute for action!
- Feeling sorry for yourself or bemoaning your situation will NOT change it.
- It's your job to change your environment if you don't like it.
- "You're nobody's victim without your permission." Eleanor Roosevelt

2. Does it REALLY matter if I'm right?

- Are you arguing merely for the sake of being right?
- Does it truly matter if you are right?
- Why do you need to be right?
- What will you gain from being right?

3. Learn to Appreciate Criticism

"the subtlety of simplicity"

- Let go of your knee-jerk reaction to criticism.
- When you verbally appreciate someone who is criticizing you, you let go of the need to defend, explain or justify, your behavior.
- It also takes away the power of the difficult person and shuts down the interaction.
- You do NOT lose face, but you do GAIN peace!

A simple "thanks" is all it takes.

- "Thanks for being honest"
- "I appreciate your feedback."
- "Thanks for caring so much."
- "I appreciate your input."

- **THIS TAKES SOME PRACTICE – BUT IT IS WORTH IT IN THE LONG RUN....**

4. Conserve Your Energy

- Energy spent dwelling on negative people
 - how badly they have treated you
 - how unfair it all is
 - how miserable they make you
- is energy that could have been spent on YOUR personal well-being.

"Where Attention Goes, Energy Flows"

5. Use "I" rather than "You"

- "YOU" can feel like an accusation – which can escalate interactions with difficult people

6. Observe and Listen

- You need to study your difficult person in order to manage their behavior.
- What sets them off?

- Is this long-term behavior?
- Identify their focus and level of assertiveness
 - Is this person task focused/aggressive?
 - Person focused/passive?
 - Or something else?

7. Blending

“No one cooperates with someone they perceive is against them”

- The first step in managing difficult people is to minimize the perceived differences between you.
- Blend your behavior and communication to match the intent, body language, and communication style with your difficult person.

If you are dealing with someone who wants to:

- **Get it Done** You acknowledge the importance of getting tasks done and your conversations are brief and to the point.
- **Get it Along** You take time to engage in chit-chat and considerate communications (lots of “please” and “thank yous”.)
- **Get Appreciation** You acknowledge their contributions with words of enthusiastic appreciation.

Consider the Worst Case Scenario

ASK YOURSELF:

- If I DO NOT respond to this difficult person, what is the worst thing that could happen?
- If I DO respond to this difficult person, what is the worst thing that could happen?

8. Stop rewarding difficult people for their behavior

- Many times we aren’t aware that we are actually adding to the problem.
- When we back down, give in, give up, or give ground, we are just rewarding difficult people for being difficult.
- Expect Respect!

9. Do not allow yourself to be drawn into the difficult behavior

- Have a mint!

10. Communicate Assertively and Effectively (and become aware of the communication used by others)



Communication Styles

Each time we interact with someone else, we have a choice in terms of how we choose to communicate. Three of them are poor choices, the other is outstanding....

Assertive Communication (the outstanding one)

- "Saying what you mean and meaning what you say"
- Relies on honesty, openness, and a sense of responsibility for a positive outcome,
- Builds mutual trust between the people involved.
- Uses an "I" message to take responsibility for issues (e.g., "This is how I feel...")
- States opinions respectfully, acknowledging that the other person may see the situation differently.
- Listens attentively, uses good eye contact, and positive body language.
- Does not allow others to take advantage.
- Is often difficult to employ because we are not conditioned to use this style of communication during childhood years (and beyond)

Aggressive Communication

- Uses hurt and anger to manipulate others.
- Discounts or disregards feelings of others
- Will say or do anything to get their own way.
- Hurt/Guilt
 - Whining and Complaining without initiating or accepting solutions
 - Dwells on the past
 - Blames others for mistakes
 - Gets feelings hurt easily
 - Has numerous physical ailments
 - Requires/demands constant attention
- Anger/Fear
 - Likes to argue - must always be right
 - Is rude, abrasive, or sarcastic
 - Often is rude, obnoxious, domineering, and loud

- Tries to intimidate rather than build mutual respect
- Is frequently out of control in tone and action
- Creates tension, mistrust, and resistant

Passive Communication

- Avoids confrontation at all costs.
- Put personal needs and concerns last; feels guilty about getting own needs met.
- Strong desire to be liked.
- Agrees to all requests and demands, even unreasonable ones, rather than saying "no."
- May produce poor results (paperwork, therapy outcomes) because of over commitment.
- May become overwhelmed and tired; eventually cannot fulfill even basic commitments.
- May ultimately "blow up" or "burn out" after a period of time.

Passive-Aggressive Communicaiton

- Combination of the desire to avoid direct confrontation (passive) and the desire to "win" - get one's own way (aggressive) at all costs.
- Is exceedingly deceitful and dishonest
- Is done with the intent to manipulate people or "teach them a lesson."
- Is damaging and dangerous to building trust and mutual respect.
- Demonstrated in behaviors such as:
 - Using the "silent treatment"
 - Often spends time gossiping/tattling on others
 - May seem supportive on the surface but actually criticizing people behind their backs.
 - Enjoys seeing others people fail
 - Likes to get people to take sides against another person, policy, or idea
 - Is the exact opposite of open, honest, assertive communication that promotes positive interactions and reduces stress

Managing Difficult People

The BULLDOZER

Intent: Get Things Done

- Aggressive
- Controlling
- Overbearing
- Pushy
- Angry
- Obnoxious

Do :Command Respect

- **Stand your ground**
 - ~Make eye contact
 - ~Visualize
 - ~Breathe
- **Interrupt (Use Name)**
- **Identify Intent**
- **Provide a "Bottom Line"**
- **Peace with Honor**

"I asked you to set up a new records system a week ago. Why isn't it in place yet? We need to get organized and we are way behind!"

- Let the bulldozer wind down (stand your ground/listen)
- "Lori, Lori, Lori, Lori..." (Interrupt the attack)
- "I understand that you are concerned about getting this new system up and running to increase our efficiency" (Identify intent)
- "From my point of view, the time I am investing in researching this will insure that we invest in a quality system that will save us time and money" (Bottom Line)
- "When you are ready to discuss this with me calmly, I am more than happy to meet with you." (Peace with honor)

DON'T

- Push back/Counterattack
- Become defensive
- Attempt to explain, defend, or justify
- Allow yourself to get run over or withdraw from the interaction

The Sniper

Intent:

Get It Done OR Get Appreciated

Do

Adjust your Attitude

- Don't React to Sniping
 - It gives them power and motivates them to keep doing it
- Remember that sniping is a symptom of insecurity
 - Think of them as an insecure grade schooler
 - (I am rubber you are glue, whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you!)
- Bring the sniper out of hiding
 - Deal directly and assertively and you will disarm the sniper
 - "Yeah - that Jenn. You ask her what time it is, she'll tell you how to make a watch." She's got nothing to say, but you have to wait so long to find out! HA HA HA! Just kidding"

STOP, BACKTRACK (Interrupt yourself -even in the middle of a sentence then backtrack to what they said. This signals "you missed me.")

USE SEARCHLIGHT QUESTIONS: "When you say that, what are you really trying to say? What does that have to do with this? (Bring the sniper out of hiding and disarm him or her)

- "What, can't you take a joke?" (typical sniper response)
- "I can take a joke, but I'm still wondering what you were trying to say?" (stand your ground)
- THIS CAN GO Two WAYS:
 - The sniper backs off immediately in which case YOU back off
 - The sniper does not back off in which case YOU just keep firing back until the limb the sniper is sitting on breaks and he/she back off
 - Hold your ground
 - Interrupt the interrupter
 - Backtrack to the main accusation
 - State your bottom line

Third Party Sniping
(Tattling)

- Tattling in the workplace happens for the same reasons it happens in school: Immaturity, need for attention, trying to establish a sense of importance, trying to undermine others.
- The key to dealing with tattlers is to DEAL WITH THE TATTLER.
- DO NOT get pulled into the third parties tattling on the tattler. Go directly to the source and ask, "Is this true?"
- (Bring that sniper out of hiding! Make him or her uncomfortable).

Don't

- Let the Sniper/Tattle have power over you
- Allow others to engage in third party sniping "tattling" with you.

The Whiner

Intent: Get It Right

- Wallows in worries and woe
- Only offers complaints - never solutions
- Complaints are not geared to change
- Do not complain to EVERYONE but the offending party
- Wants things to be right, but can only see what's wrong

Do

- Listen with compassion - briefly
- Interrupt if necessary
- Ask them is there is something specific that they need you to do
- Direct them to the proper person
- Draw the line

Don't

- Agree with whiners - it just encourages them to keep whining
- Disagree - they will feel compelled to repeat their problems
- Try to solve their problems - you can't

The Wet Blanket

Intent: Get it Right

- Since perfection is the standard for everything, nothing measures up.
- Nitpicker
- Afraid of failing
- May be a grumbler or apathetic
- Hopeless
- Bitter
- Negativity is their M.O.
- Is TOXIC to individuals and organizations
 - Undermines motivation
 - Stifles creativity
 - Leads to hopeless and depression in others (spreads like CRAZY!)
 - Negatively impacts stress levels, productivity, and job satisfaction

DO: Guard against Being Influenced by the Wet Blanket

- Consider voting with your feet
- Use them as a resource to help you find potential flaws in a plan
- Leave the door open ("If you change your mind, let me know.")
- Identify positive intent ("Val, you're obviously a person who cares about making sure things go well.")

Don't

- Allow contempt to substitute for compassion
- Allow their negativity to affect you
- Don't expect the wet blanket to "dry out" overnight

The Bully

Intent: Get It Done Right, Get it Done, Get Appreciated, Get Attention

- Cannot be happy unless others are miserable
- Uses passive aggressive and aggressive communication styles
- Must have willing accomplices
- Lives in a world of misery and contempt for themselves
- Uses sniping, gossip, and fear mongering
- Cannot see that they are the problem - complains about everyone else.

Do

- Limit your interactions with a bully
- Don't play the victim
- Stay professional and be crystal clear that you will not be drawn in
- Interrupt if necessary
- "Have a mint"
- Take a Stand/Draw the Line
- Use assertive communication
- Document/Share if necessary
- Consider Your Safety

Don't

- Agree with or join the bully's team
- Allow yourself to be intimidated
- Attack back
- Allow the bully to suck energy out of your life to feed their miserable soul

DIFFICULT PEOPLE BIG IDEAS

Expect Respect!

We train other people how to treat us.

Don't allow yourself (or others) to make excuses for the person who is being difficult

Don't take their behavior personally - they most likely treat everyone badly

Don't reward difficult people for their negative behavior

Have a mint!

You can't control the behavior of others- only your OWN behavior in response to them.

PRIMARY RESOURCE: I Used to Have a Handle on Life, But it Broke.
Shari Robertson, Dynamic Resources.

www.dynamic-resources.org

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IDENTIFY A DIFFICULT PERSON IN YOUR LIFE!
(PAST OR PRESENT)



What makes/made this person difficult? (Why do/did you think of them as a difficult person? What specific behaviors are/were demonstrated. Was this a single incident or long term issues?)

What negative impacts did/does this have on your life (personal and professional)



What did you/have you tried to attempt to manage this difficult person or relationship?



I think my difficult person was/is:

TASK FOCUSED

(choose one) Passive Aggressive

OR

PEOPLE FOCUSED

(choose one) Passive Aggressive

I think my difficult person's intent was/is:

To get things done

To get things done right

To get along

To get appreciated

I need to consider changing my behavior in response to this difficult person (and others) in the following ways:

1. Dump the victim mentality
2. Doesn't it really matter if I'm right?
3. Learn to appreciate criticism
4. Conserve your energy
5. Use "I" rather than "You" language
6. Listen and Observe
7. Blend
8. Do not allowing yourself to be drawn into the difficult behavior
9. Stop rewarding difficult people for their behavior
10. Communicate Assertively and Effectively

ACTION PLAN

My difficult person was/is a:

Bulldozer

Ticking Time Bomb

Know it All

Whiner

Hot Air Balloon

Wet Blanket

Sniper

Bully



My best choice/s to deal with this person is/are:

Stay and Do Nothing

Change My Attitude

Vote with My Feet

Change My Behavior



The specific strategies I will use are: