

Learning to Deal With Difficult People

The Bottom Line: Difficult people can make your workday less enjoyable. With the right strategies, you can learn to deal with them effectively.

If you have to work with difficult people every day, you probably dread going to work each morning. What's more, you might get so stressed that you can't concentrate on the job.

Have you ever wondered why some people are difficult to work with?

"Individuals behave in a difficult manner because they have learned that doing so keeps others off balance and incapable of effective action. Worst of all, they appear immune to all the usual methods of communication and persuasion designed to convince or help them change their ways," says Robert M. Bramson, Ph.D., author of *Coping With Difficult People*.

Bramson offers the following strategies for coping with such people.

Continued on page two – Difficult People



Why are some people difficult to work with?

Developing Time Conscious Attitudes and Goal Oriented Habits

The first step in changing any habit is to identify the habit that you want to change.

This is true for your time attitudes as well. Establish a period of time in which to analyze situations, your attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Evaluate your present time use. Take time to record exactly how you spend your time. This is usually an important discovery process. Most people have a very inaccurate understanding of how they actually spend their time.

Pinpoint precise behaviors that are incompatible with your vision, goals, and values. For example, if your goals are to do well in your job, which might mean getting promoted and getting a larger salary, but you keep making commitments to friends and family that keep you from doing really well at work, your behavior is not in line with your goals. If you learned as a child that the approval of others was important and you find yourself regularly agreeing to do more than you can handle, your behavior is understandable, but may also be self defeating. Examine your attitudes and early conditioning to determine if a change in your thinking might well be useful. If you want to achieve outstanding success, but you put in minimal hours and exert only average effort, your behavior is inconsistent with your goals. Either change your goals to ones that will inspire you to change your behavior, or change your behavior by developing new habits that will get you to your goals.

It is important to define the new habits that you may wish to develop.

Continued on page three - Time Conscious Attitudes

Inside This Issue

1. *Learning to Deal With Difficult People*
1. *Developing Time Conscious Attitudes and Goal Setting Habits*
3. *One Minute Ideas*
3. *Finding a New Cell Plan!*
4. *Power Words*

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Continued from page one – *Difficult People*

How to Cope

Avoid these “don'ts” when dealing with difficult people:

- Don't take difficult people's behavior personally. Their troublesome behavior is habitual and affects most people with whom they come in contact.
- Don't fight back or try to beat them at their own games. They have been practicing their skills for a lifetime, and you're an amateur.
- Don't try to appease them. Difficult people have an insatiable appetite for more.
- Don't try to change them. You can only change your responses to their behavior.

Here's how you can cope effectively with four common types of difficult people.

Openly Aggressive People

Stand up to them, but don't fight. Overly aggressive people expect others to either run away from them or react with rage. Your goal is simply to assertively express your own views, not try to win a battle of right and wrong.

First, wait for the person to run out of some steam. Then call the person by name and assert your own opinions with confidence.

Snipers

Difficult people are experts at taking potshots and making sneak attacks in subtle ways, such as humorous put-downs, sarcastic tones of voice, disapproving looks and innuendoes.



You may feel uncomfortable replying to them because you don't like confrontation. This, however, allows snipers to get away with their covert hostility.

Respond to a sniper with a question. “That sounds like you're making fun of me. Are you?” A sniper usually replies to such accusations with denial, “I'm only joking.”

Nevertheless, questioning covert attacks will reduce the chance for similar attacks in the future.

Continued on next column –

Complainers

These are fearful people who have little faith in themselves and others because they believe in a hostile world. Their constant discouragement and complaining can bring everyone to despair.

“Don't try to argue these difficult people out of their negativity. Instead, respond with your own optimistic expectations,” says Bramson.

Silent People

People who ignore you, give you sullen looks, and/or respond to every question with either “I don't know” or silence are difficult because they're timid. Silent people get away with not talking because most people are uncomfortable with silence and are too quick to fill in the gaps. Ask them questions that can't be answered with just a “yes” or “no,” such as, “Why is it uncomfortable for you to answer my questions?”



Then wait at least one full minute before you say anything. This long silence may make them uncomfortable enough to say something. If they do start talking, listen carefully.

Don't Give Up

Dealing with difficult people takes practice, so don't get discouraged.

Although these strategies won't change the difficult people, they will break their ability to interfere with your effectiveness,” says Bramson. “Most important, you'll feel more confident and you'll start to enjoy your workdays.”

Harriet Meyerson spoke with Robert M. Bramson Ph.D., author of *Coping With Difficult People*, Published in *VITALITY* Magazine. Reprinted with permission.

Motivational Quotes Corner

“Always do your best. What you plant now, you will harvest later.”

— Og Mandino



“No man fails who does his best...”

— Orison Swett Marden

“The scars you acquire by exercising courage will never make you feel inferior.”

— D.A. Battista

Continued from page one – *Time Conscious Attitudes*

Identify them as specifically as you are able. For example, if you want to develop habits conducive to being successful in business, you might read biographies of business leaders or become part of a leadership development program. You might also seek out a mentor to learn more of what it takes to be successful. In other words, determine the skills you will need and develop a plan to acquire them.

Look for opportunities to practice and ask for help from others. Let them know your goals. Acquire the discipline to concentrate on what you want to eliminate, what won't get you there. Be meticulous about your daily planning process. *Plan Tomorrow Before You Leave Today!* Both self discipline and self management are critical aspects of time management. Both of these can be developed. Focus on your rewards; they must exceed in value the price you will pay in effort, or you'll be inclined to revert to old habits. Once you decide to do something, give your word to keep at it until you win! Keep your word. Take responsibility for your own success or failure. Recognize the difference and the value of a long term benefit rather than momentary gratification.

Develop a winner's attitude. Think positively about your opportunities, your potential, your ability to achieve your goals, and your right to success. Focus your thoughts. Train yourself to seek solutions, not place blame, and to focus on what you can control, not on what you can't. If you break an iron rod at its weakest point and weld it back together again, the weakest point becomes the strongest point.



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Finding a New Cell Plan

Few things are as aggravating as picking a cell-phone plan. But there's help online. That is especially important since people can switch carriers and take their numbers with them.

For instance, CellUpdate.com makes plan selection relatively painless. Fill out a short questionnaire, and it recommends one or two plans. Other helpful sites are NumberPortability.com and Wirefly.com. There's more information at:

www.cellupdate.com
www.numberportability.com/index.php
www.wirefly.com/



Are you wondering which carrier is preferred? J.D. Power has ratings based on customer responses. It's at:

www.jdpower.com/cc/telecom/jdpa_ratings/wireless/Find.jsp

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ONE MINUTE IDEAS

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Bankrate.com provides the tools and information that can help consumers make the best financial decisions.

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Power Words



Sequester (si KWES tur) v. – to set or keep apart

Example: Since much of the rest of the city has become a battle zone, the visiting entertainers were sequestered in the international hotel.

Serendipity (ser un DIP uh tee) n. – accidental good fortune; discovering good things without looking for them

Example: It was serendipity rather than genius that led the archaeologist to his breathtaking discovery of the ancient civilization.

Taciturn (TAS i turn) adj. – un-talkative by nature

Example: The chairman was so taciturn that we often discovered that we had absolutely no idea what he was thinking.

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