

Turn Negativity Around

Nearly everyone experiences conflict at some point. A conflict between co-workers over opinions or goals can easily get out of hand unless it's dealt with effectively and calmly. **Here's how:**

- **Find something you can agree on.**

In most cases, you can find common ground between the two of you, even when it seems you disagree on most points. At the very least, you can begin moving forward positively with this point: "You're right. There's a problem. Let's work together to solve it."

- **Learn how to disagree.** Some differences just can't be resolved, especially if you're convinced that your position is the right one. Sometimes all you can do is agree to disagree, and then move on.
- **Put the ball in the other person's court.** What you say can encourage dialogue that leads to an amicable resolution. **Example:** "It seems that you're angry (unhappy, frustrated, upset). Can you help me understand what's bothering you?"
- **Take a break.** Sometimes it's better to postpone the discussion until you've both had a chance to calm down and think clearly.
- **Avoid blame and labels.** Focus on the problem at hand and how to solve it rather than branding someone as difficult or resorting to insults.
- **Take the high road.** If the person you're in conflict with becomes angry or resorts to insults or bullying, remember that *you* are in control of how you react. Maintain your professionalism. Walk away, refuse to respond in kind and involve a supervisor when necessary.

More Tips for Getting Along

Difficult people can have a "toxic" effect on the workplace. Ongoing negativity, abusive actions and just plain rudeness from one employee can lower the productivity, morale and satisfaction of everyone.

Don't let difficult people get you down.

Don't show a reaction. Most offenders find it hard to maintain a bad attitude or insulting behavior in the face of courtesy, politeness and professionalism. If you don't react, they tend to lose interest.

Set an example. Modeling appropriate behavior promotes a healthy work environment for everyone.

Manage stress in healthy ways. Working with a difficult person causes stress, which can bring on headaches, sleep problems, fatigue and irritability. Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, visualizing a peaceful place or meditation. Make time for exercise, hobbies and other enjoyable activities.

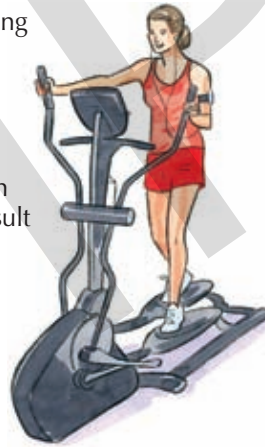
Put problems into perspective. Recognize when a person's behavior is not the result of anything you did.

Stay positive and optimistic. Focus on what you like about your job and your co-workers, and take steps to re-energize with new goals or positive activities.

Be confident. Speak with conviction about your own expertise and listen to what others have to contribute as well.

Know when you need help. Some interactions with difficult people need a neutral third party. Know when to involve an unbiased point of view.

Final thought: You can't change others, but you can change the way you react to difficult situations. Stay positive in the face of negative behavior and you'll stay steady no matter who crosses your path.



Don't Take It Personally

How to Deal with Difficult People



Dealing with Difficult People

You may have worked with this kind of person before: the complainer, the interrupter, the bully, the braggart, the gossip or the credit stealer — someone you could easily label “difficult.” Dealing with difficult people (or those you perceive to be difficult) is a challenge for many in today’s fast-paced, goal-oriented workplace.

If you’re struggling with bad feelings toward someone you think is difficult, remember that how you react is important to making the situation better. The tips in this brochure can help.

You’re in This Together

Difficult people and the circumstances that surround them can test your confidence, self-esteem and professionalism. At some point, you might even dread going to work because the situation makes you feel stressed or negative. However, before you label someone difficult, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 **Could I be overreacting?**
- 2 **Do I have negative or challenging interactions with people more often than not?**
- 3 **Could people think that I am difficult?**

Take a step back and examine your reactions to various situations. Do you get defensive when you’re criticized ... shut down when someone confronts you ... feel uncomfortable when you’re not in control? It helps to view a difficult situation in different ways before you react.



Common People Problems and How to Solve Them

The energy, creativity and success of your workplace come from many different people contributing their unique strengths, skills and ideas. Disagreements and personality clashes might seem inevitable.

That said, some personalities truly are difficult, and certain types of behavior can hurt relationships and morale, as well as cause distractions. Try to focus less on the person and more on the problems created by the person’s behavior. **Common problems and possible solutions:**

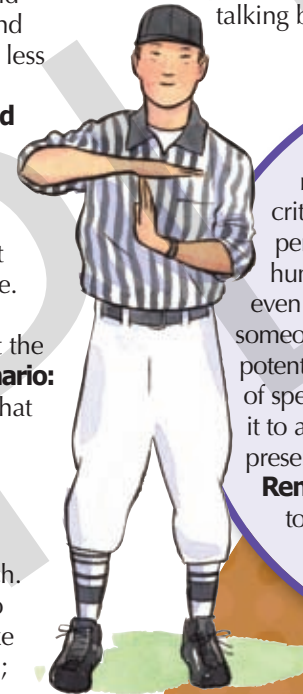
PROBLEM: Stealing credit. Taking credit for someone else’s work or ideas often stems from insecurity. **Solution:** If someone takes credit for your work, resist the urge to accuse or retaliate. Let others know about your role without placing blame. If you don’t have to work with or help out the person again in the future, don’t. **Best-case scenario:** Employees can share credit for achievements so that no one feels the need to overstep.

PROBLEM: Avoiding responsibility. Some people are good at passing off duties or half-completed tasks to co-workers; others won’t step outside their job descriptions to help out in a pinch. It can be discouraging. **Solution:** The best way to avoid being delegated to (or dumped on) is to take control of your to-do list. Help out when you can; but if you can’t take on another project or if you feel taken advantage of, say “not at this time.” If someone insists that his or her workload is too heavy or asks for help too frequently, suggest that he or she talk to a supervisor.

PROBLEM: Poor communication. Some people are assertive, while others mumble. Some people hide behind e-mail or voice mail to avoid personal contact. **Solution:** Improve your own skills. Ask questions when you don’t understand; meet face-to-face when electronic communications are muddled or misunderstood; listen actively and speak clearly. Most communication problems are solved with a little patience and effort.

PROBLEM: Complaining. People who complain about most everything are probably unhappy. They tend to share their negativity with anyone who will listen. **Solution:** Change the subject to something positive when the complaining starts. He or she will soon get the message.

PROBLEM: Gossiping. It’s common for gossip to undermine reputations, which is bad for individuals and the workplace. **Solution:** Shut down the rumor mill. Just stop listening, change the subject or simply excuse yourself. If pressed, just say you’re uncomfortable talking behind someone’s back.



PROBLEM: Bullying. Bullying takes many forms including unjustified criticism, shouting, foul language, personal insults, exclusion and isolation, humiliation, watching or shadowing, and even practical joking. Behavior that singles someone out for different, unfair treatment can potentially be bullying. **Solution:** Keep a diary of specific details about each incident. Report it to a supervisor and have a third party present when you meet with that person. **Remember:** A true bully is reacting to his or her own problems, and the behavior isn’t the result of anything you did.

Build Your People Skills: 6 QUICK TIPS

1. **SPEAK UP.** Talk with the person directly and professionally. Give him or her the chance to change.
2. **DON’T TAKE IT PERSONALLY.** Resolve that the problem is a professional issue, not a personal one. Try to remain calm and emotionally detached.
3. **GET SUPPORT.** Ask a trusted colleague, a manager or a mediator for help.
4. **PRACTICE patience.** Learn to develop diplomacy, negotiation and good communication.
5. **DISENGAGE.** When possible, take a break from the interaction until you feel better about it.
6. **LISTEN.** Slow down and really listen before you speak or judge.

Remember the value of teamwork and cooperation.