Are You a Difficult Person?

Perhaps you don't think of yourself as difficult, but in truth, all people have their moments. Avoid being one of the "difficult people" in your workplace by keeping these points in mind.

Communicate.
Rather than barking orders or not saying what you need to say (and then letting it out in other ways later), be honest and forthright with co-workers. Give the reasons behind your requests, frame your communications in respectful language and check periodically to make sure that others understand what you said.

Respect boundaries.
You may have an important point to get across, but notice if the person you're speaking to appears distracted or stressed. If so, ask him or her if you could come back at a better time, or give the person a chance to speak.

Handle frustration constructively.
Everyone has a bad day once in a while. Find ways to deal with your negative moods that don't involve getting angry with those around you. Try: Exercising, meditating, calling a friend to talk or writing about what is bothering you.

You Always Have Options

When a difficult person comes your way, you may feel trapped and anxious. You may not be able to change the other person's words, actions or behavior ... but you can change your own.

- **Do nothing.** Sometimes it's best to simply allow the difficult person to say what they need to say while you remain calm and quiet.
- **Walk away.** Politely excuse yourself from the situation. If you feel yourself getting angry or defensive, tell the person you need to call them back or speak to them later. Take a break, take a walk and think about what you need to say next.
- **Change the way you feel and act.** Instead of swapping angry words or saying nothing, find a productive way to deal with the difficult person. Tell yourself that today your interactions with the difficult person will be different.

Remember: No matter how difficult someone appears to be, everyone deserves respect. How you react to people is up to you.

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

Working Well With Others

RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

In both your work and personal lives, it's inevitable that you'll come across different types of people, some pleasant and some not so pleasant. You need to find a way to calmly and rationally deal with points of view that differ from how you respond. Use the tips provided here to help avoid the frustration of continual conflict.

Say "No" to Stress

Difficult people can cause you stress and frustration. You might not be able to change a difficult person, but you can change how you react to him or her. A little stress management goes a long way toward helping you calm down and refocus on your work.

Try these techniques:

Walk away. When you feel your temper rising, take a break. Walk, breathe deeply and count to 10.

Prepare yourself. Rehearse conversations or meetings with the difficult person before they happen. Envision a positive and nonconfrontational outcome.

Find some space. If you can, rearrange your work space so you don't have to work near the difficult person ... or at least so you don't have to face him or her. If that's not possible, add personal items, such as family pictures or a calendar with soothing images, to your space to give yourself something pleasant to focus on.

Tune Out

Sometimes the best way to deal with a difficult person is to find a way not to. In some organizations, wearing earphones to drown out conversations and noise is acceptable. Just don't turn up the music so loud that you can't hear if someone needs to ask you a question.

How to Agree to Disagree

What can you do if you have a co-worker or a customer you don't get along with? First, remember that this is business and not your personal life — you can learn to deal with this person in a professional manner even if you disagree with him or her personally. ***Here's how:***

Don't take it personally. This person's frustration isn't necessarily caused by you, and there may be nothing you can do to change the person. Focus on keeping yourself calm and detached.

Change your attitude. Find ways to work with the person to solve problems, instead of making it "you" against "them." Think of dealing with the person as a challenge you can meet. Be polite. Use tact instead of confrontation. Listen when the other person speaks, and resist the urge to interrupt.

Communicate. Tell the person what is bothering you in a calm, professional manner. Ask him or her to work with you to make things better.

The bottom line: Taking the time to treat others with professionalism and respect goes a long way toward avoiding conflict.

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional care. Medical Editor: Zorka Ferster, M.D.
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