

Dealing With Difficult People

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It seems that they are everywhere. Every organisation seems to have some, there is often one in your team, and more than likely you have a number as customers or clients too. Difficult people. People who are simply hard to get on with. People who really wear you down.

Anyone come to mind?

My guess would be that the people who are causing you the most frustration would probably behave in one of the following ways: aggressive, destructive, know-it-all or procrastinator.

So what is the answer to working successfully with difficult people? The first thing you must accept is that they probably won't change... (sorry, but it's important to face realities!) – therefore, it's up to you to find a strategy that works when dealing with them.

Here are some good strategies to try.

The Aggressor

Generally the aggressor can't stand wimps! The more you kowtow to them, the more aggressive their behaviour will be. The best way to win them over is to stand up for yourself. (Never, ever be aggressive back - it just doesn't work!) Try this:

1. Don't allow them to interrupt you. If they do, calmly say "Excuse me (their name) you interrupted me" ... and go on saying what you were saying.
2. Be direct. Don't beat around the bush. Give them the facts.
3. Use 'being assertive technique'. (see below)

The 'being assertive technique' is simply using the phrases *when you...* (refer to their behaviour); *I feel...* (say how it makes you feel such as angry, frustrated); *...because* (the reason); *...I would prefer...* (state what you want). For example let's say Bill is always interrupting you. You would use this technique by saying "Bill, *when you* interrupt me, *I feel* frustrated *because* you aren't letting me express my full opinion *I would prefer* if you let me finish what I was saying before you expressed your point of view".

I've used this technique on some very aggressive people with great success. They generally respond with surprise because they don't realise their behaviour is not appropriate. This approach also gains their attention and respect.

The Saboteur

This type of behaviour is currently reaching epidemic proportions in business as more and more people become insecure about their future prospects. They will deliberately sabotage your position by not telling you about important meetings or policy decisions; or maybe gossiping behind your back, or blaming you for something you didn't do.

They can cause big trouble if they are allowed to continue unchallenged.

You should:

1. Confront them
2. Create and maintain allies
3. Keep good records.

Often it can boil down to your word against theirs. It's therefore very important to be sure of your facts and have the evidence to prove them.

The Know-It-All

You know the ones, they are always right and therefore won't listen to anyone else's point of view. Here's how you handle them:

1. Do your homework - have your facts straight.
2. Use 'agreement phrases' such as "I appreciate what you're saying and..." or "I understand what you're saying and ..." to align and then make your point.
3. Seek their advice to flatter them and build rapport.

The Procrastinator

These are people who can't make up their minds and can be extremely frustrating when you are dependent on them for something.

They tend to stall major decisions in the hope that they will go away.

People who avoid making decisions usually use this stalling strategy as a compromise between being honest and not hurting anyone. Here's how to deal with them:

1. Find out what their real concerns are
2. Help them solve their problems with the decision
3. If possible, keep the action steps in your hands!

By understanding what is motivating a person's behaviour you can more effectively deal with that behaviour .. but that's another article!

The secret to all effective communication is to be confident and to focus on the other person - what do they want to know rather than what do I want to tell them.

Try it, it works.

If you would like a copy of Candy's *Working Through a Difficult Conversation Checklist* – simply send her an email at: candy@tymson.com.au



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