

Managing Relationships
Skills for Successfully Having Difficult Conversations



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Part 1 – Difficult People 101

Difficult people force us to fall back on our coping mechanisms.

- Some of us placate, others confront.
- Some balk, others become aggressive.



Unfortunately, we are regularly faced with difficult people. The way we handle them can affect our job and our health.

When dealing with difficult people, begin by asking yourself:

1. Can I change the situation?
2. Do I have to put up with it?

When you ask these questions in a rational frame of mind, you will be able to formulate a workable approach that is consistent and effective.

1. Can I change the situation?

No one changes unless he/she wants to. Difficult people rarely want to.

Your best chance of creating change occurs if the following things are present.

- You have a personal connection with the person.
- You have earned his/her respect.
- You've discreetly tested the waters and found him/her a bit open to change.
- You've received signals that he/she wants to change.



- You aren't afraid or intimidated
- The two of you are fairly equal in power. If the difficult person is in a dominant position, such as being your boss, your status is to imbalanced.

Remember - Difficult people aren't going to change just to make you feel better. The worst chance of getting someone else to change occurs when you're so angry, frustrated, and fed up that you lose your composure and demand change.

2. Do I have to put up with it?

When you can't change a situation, only two options remain, either put up with it or seek assistance. Most of us aren't very effective in getting someone else to change, so we adapt in various ways. We become experts at putting up with things. The real question is whether you are coping in a healthy or unhealthy way.

Look at the following lists and honestly ask yourself how well you are putting up with your difficult person.

Unhealthy:

- I keep quiet and let them have their way. It isn't worth the fight.
- I complain behind their backs.
- I shut down emotionally.
- I don't say what I really mean half the time, for fear of getting into trouble or losing control.
- I subtly signal my disapproval.
- I engage in endless arguments that no one wins.
- I have symptoms of stress (headache, knots in the stomach, insomnia, depression, and anxiety)



- I know I want to get out of this situation, but I keep convincing myself that I have to stick it out.
- I indulge in fantasies of revenge.

What other unhealthy emotions or behaviors do you feel go along with dealing with difficult people?

Healthy

- I assess what works best for me and avoid what doesn't.
- I approach the difficult person as rationally as possible.
- I don't get into emotional drama with them.
- I make sure I am respected by them. I keep my dignity.
- I can see the insecurity that lies beneath the surface of their bad behavior.
- I don't dwell on their behavior. I don't complain behind their backs or lose sleep.



- I keep away from anyone who can't handle the situation, the perpetual complainers, gossips, and connivers.
- My interaction with the difficult person has no hidden agenda, like revenge. We are here for mutual benefit, not psychodrama.
- I know I can walk away whenever I have to, so I don't feel trapped.
- I feel genuine respect and admiration for what's good in this person.

Healthy? Unhealthy?

If your approach contains too many unhealthy ingredients, you are just rationalizing a hopeless situation. If you have exhausted all your options and are feeling overwhelmed by the problem you may need to escalate the situation to a higher authority for resolution.

When would you escalate a situation?

What to do if you need to escalate the situation

1. Ask yourself if you have honestly tried all options
2. Have you tried using a communication plan?
3. Have you exhausted your own resources?
4. Regardless of your efforts, is there no improvement?
If your answer is yes, then it is time to seek assistance.
1. Before moving forward. Be prepared.
2. Stay unemotional.
3. Bring any documentation you have if the issue
4. Bring copies of any communication plan
5. If possible. Present a solution you feel would work to improve the situation.
6. Ask for a response date so you know action is being taken

Part 2 - 10 Tips for Dealing with Difficult People

Some people are just plain hard to get along with. But you don't have to let them get under your skin.

Unfortunately, we are faced everyday with difficult people -- be they co-workers, bosses, partners or client. The way we handle them can affect our job and even our health.

There are ways to help you cope with these problematic relationships.

10 Tips for helping you deal with those difficult people situations

- 1: Try not to take things personally
- 2: Ask questions rather than make statements
- 3: Have supporting evidence in writing
- 4: Ensure understanding and communication. Remember to LISTEN



5: Use appropriate phrases when needed

- "That's not what I said."
- "That was not my question."
- "Please let me finish."
- "We're [actually] saying the same thing."

6: Use "I" rather than "you"

7: Separate the issue from the person



8: Be assertive rather than obnoxious

9: Turn the tables

10: Express appreciation when appropriate

Part 3 – Communication Plan

A consistent communication plan is always important but even more so when working with difficult people. When a communication plan is put in place when meeting with difficult people it will:

- Provide a framework for conversation that removes emotion
- Eliminate misunderstanding
- Manage expectations
- Set outcomes and timelines
- Provide documentation of conversations



Communication Plan Discussion

Q & A