

## DEALING WITH DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES

Have you ever had to manage or work with one of these types of employees?

Aggressive  
Demeaning  
Arrogant  
Insubordinate

Untrustworthy  
Demanding  
Unproductive

- These people have the ability to make your life very uncomfortable.
- When working with groups, they can hurt the team spirit or cause the group to isolate them – but no matter what happens, the productivity of your unit will be less than it could be.
- Understanding why difficult people, especially employees, are the way they are is one big step in handling one or more of them when your paths cross.

### Things We Need to Recognize

- Difficult people generally use their behavior because it works for them. That's how they can gain control over situations.
- Generally, difficult people have an inability to resolve differences and they strive for a win / lose outcome.

### Approaching the Difficult Coworker

- Maintain a positive attitude - be direct, descriptive and nonjudgmental.
- Go after the detrimental behavior, not the person who is misbehaving.
- Be careful not to be judgmental, for we don't know everything in the employee's life that may be contributing to the behavior.
- Be prepared with the facts, not gossip or rumors.
- Keep in mind the key ingredients of effective communication and the importance of:
  - Maintaining eye contact
  - Watching the tone of the voice
  - Timing the discussion appropriately
- Remember, timing is just as important here as in all other aspects of life.

## **Types of Difficult Employees**

- The Complainer
- The Backstabber
- The Busybody
- The Maybe Person
- The No Person
- The Explosive Employee
- The Belligerent Aggressor
- The Harasser
- The Jealous Worker

### **The Complainer**

- Voices lots of complaints but offers few, if any suggestions.
- Appears blameless and innocent.
- Feels he/she must get personal opinions across.
- Gets worse if ignored.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Try to find the cause.
2. Listen – do not agree or disagree.
3. Avoid accusations.
4. Ask specific questions.
5. Stick to the facts.
6. If their complaints are job-related, determine whether they're unable or unwilling to perform the duties.

### **The Backstabber**

- Often wants to “move up”.
- Seeks to undermine their supervisor and make him look foolish.
- Is extremely passive-aggressive.
- Puts on a friendly face but “snipes” behind your back.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Make it clear that you are aware of his/her ways.
2. Give specific, job-related orders.
3. Set necessary limits regarding behaviors that won't be tolerated.

### **The Maybe Person**

- Talks a “good game”.
- Usually doesn’t produce.
- Procrastinates, hoping a better choice will present itself.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Pinpoint work objectives; tie him/her down in advance; and cover “who does what for whom and by when”.
2. Make your expectations clear.
3. Seek any other causes. Sometimes they might be acting out of fear, inability, confusion or boredom.

### **The No Person**

- Is sometimes a perfectionist.
- Avoids mistakes at any cost.
- Loses hope and shares feelings with all when things go wrong.
- Extinguishes hope in others, smothering all creative sparks.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Employ compassion and patience, not contempt.
2. Use him/her as a resource for others.
3. Use this person as your personal character builder.
4. Run new ideas past this person for critique before moving ahead.

### **The Busybody**

- Is a professional meddler.
- Believes he/she knows everything (and is usually wrong.)
- Likes to drop-in anytime to gossip and relate their latest “discovery”.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Visit him/her privately.
2. Help this person see how whispered charges hurt the whole unit.
3. Keep him/her busy, leaving little time to gossip.
4. Focus on the problem – its impact on their work and that of others, and take necessary corrective action.

### **The Explosive Employee**

- “Blows up” if threatened.
- Needs to prove himself.
- Has concrete answers for everything.
- Opposes any variations in process.
- Becomes irritated and impatient if plans are resisted.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Don't expect change.
2. Let them run down, and then regain their control after they explode.
3. Show them you take their opinion and others' seriously, and that there is a need to respect all equally.

### **The Belligerent Aggressor**

- Bullies his/her way to achieve what they want.
- Embarrasses coworkers, thinking they'll gain support of others.
- Throws temper tantrums.
- Tries to make supervisor (you) feel you're doing poorly when you're actually doing well.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Use self-control and be consistent.
2. Do NOT let them pressure you into doing what you don't want to do.
3. Confront but do NOT oppose their accusations of you.
4. Respond with caution.
5. Set a time to deal with the situation.

### **The Harasser**

- Personally attacks coworkers.
- Avoids the real issue.
- Tries to set others up as “opponents” to impress their superior (you).
- Cannot be objective.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Establish and maintain a meeting plan to discuss the concerns.
2. Do NOT allow the discussion to drift.
3. Keep discussions to the point.
4. Refocus conversations as necessary.

### **The Jealous Worker**

- Distinguishing mark is jealousy.
- Believes he/she should have something not earned.
- Reacts with spiteful behavior when others get raises or promotions.

### **Suggested Action**

1. Keep conversations friendly and professional.
2. Avoid being dragged into an argument.
3. Always remind this person that everyone is evaluated or assessed according to their own efforts.

### **Checklist for Dealing with Difficult Employees**

- Remain positive.
- Be direct, descriptive and nonjudgmental.
- Be prepared with facts, not gossip or rumors.
- Address the problem, don't attack the person.
- Maintain eye contact (also be aware of your body language).
- Watch your tone of voice and timing.

### **Additional Guidelines**

- Realize that the behavior is often predictable. Look for patterns.
- Expect that behavior will impact others.
- Know when to withdraw and turn to experts such as medical and psychological professionals (even if you do some personal counseling.)
- Try to discover the root causes of the problem so they can be addressed most appropriately, either by you or other professionals.

### **Summary**

- Societal pressures often have incredible impact on our employees. The demands of work, families, friends and even our cultural attitude of demanding time for ourselves all contribute to how our employees behave or react to circumstances.
- The least we can do is prepare to deal with them effectively as they cross our paths.
- Doing so not only helps us, it helps them, coworkers and the people we all collectively serve.