

Wroten & Associates

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Improving Difficult Working Relationships

"Everybody has a hot button. Who is pushing yours? While you probably cannot control that person, you CAN control the way you react to them." - Unknown

Working with people you don't like can be challenging. No matter who you are or where you work, there will most likely be a time when you have to work with someone you don't like or is difficult to work with. This could be a co-worker, client, consultant or even your boss. Negative relationships can take their toll and create a stressful work environment to say the least. Many of us have different workplace values and habits and sometimes these can clash. Learning how to work more effectively with difficult people can create less stress, and a more enjoyable and productive work environment.

How can we empower ourselves to effectively handle these difficult individuals? First and foremost, it is important to understand and accept the fact that you can only control yourself! Here are a few suggestions to help you do exactly that:

- **Keep your cool!** Maintaining your composure and avoiding escalation of the problem will allow you to use better judgment in handling the situation effectively. Count to ten or take a time out before you react.
- **Be proactive not reactive!** By shifting from being reactive to proactive you will minimize misinterpretations and misunderstandings. When you are feeling offended by someone's words or actions, try to identify multiple ways of viewing the situation before you react. Don't personalize the situation or event. This will enable you to view the situation more objectively. Remember, their behavior is often not a result of what you have done. People do what they do because of their own issues. Always be reasonable and considerate.
- **Separate the person from the issue!** There are always two elements in communication: the relationship you have with the person and the issue that is being discussed. As an effective communicator it is important to separate the person from the issue and to be soft on the person and firm on the issue. By being soft on the person, they become more receptive to what you are saying. By being firm on the issue, you are showing yourself to be a confident and strong problem solver.
- **Use humor appropriately!** When used appropriately humor can disarm difficult behaviors, defuse the issue, and decrease hostility. It also demonstrates that you are being proactive and not reactive.
- **Confronting the difficult person (Office Bullies)!** The benefits of safely confronting office bullies is the reduction or elimination of their harmful behavior and an increase in your confidence. It is important to keep in mind that bullies pick on those whom they perceive as weak, so if you are passive and compliant you may be a target. When

you begin to show strength and stand up for yourself, the bully will most often back down. Be sure, always, to be in a position where you have other people present for support and/or keep a paper trail of the inappropriate behavior. And, of course, confrontation should never include physical contact.

- **Pick your battles!** Think twice about confrontation. Not all individuals require confrontation about their behavior. Remember, most difficult people have positive qualities as well. You have the power to decide if a situation is serious enough to confront. Fight only those battles that are truly worth fighting.

Improving bad working relationships is possible. By changing your attitude and approach towards difficult people, you'll gain a wealth of knowledge and build relationships. You will also find that others respond differently to you because they sense your composure, empathy, and willingness to listen.

Wishing you an empowered and insightful month!

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