

Unit 5 – Conflict Management

Dealing with Difficult People

While working in groups or teams, you may encounter someone who becomes or who is difficult to work with. It is best to manage the conflict or problem effectively and to avoid escalating the conflict. The following are five productive ways to deal with difficult people (About Human Resources. 2006).

Unit 5 – Part 2: Conflict Management



1. Examine yourself.

Are you sure that the other person is really the problem and that you're not overreacting? Have you always experienced difficulty with the same type of person or actions? Does a pattern exist for you in your interaction with people? Do you recognize that you have hot buttons that are easily pushed? Always start with self-examination to determine that the object of your attention really is a difficult person's actions.

2. Explore what you are experiencing with a trusted friend or colleague.

Brainstorm ways to address the situation. It is often difficult to objectively assess your options. Anger, pain, humiliation, fear and concern about making the situation worse are legitimate emotions. Pay attention to the unspoken agreement you create when you solicit another's assistance. You are committing to act unless you agree actions will only hurt the situation.

3. Approach the person with whom you are having the problem for a private discussion.

Talk to the person about what you are experiencing in "I" messages. (Using "I" messages is a communication approach that focuses on your experience of the situation rather than on attacking or accusing the other person.) You can also explain to your team member the impact of his or her actions on you.

Be pleasant and agreeable as you talk with the other person. He or she may not be aware of the impact of his or her words or actions on you. The person may be learning about his or her impact on you for the first time. Or, he or she may have to consider and confront a pattern in his or her own interaction with people. Worst case? The person may know his or her impact on you and deny it or try to explain it away. Unfortunately, some difficult people just don't care. During the discussion, attempt to reach an agreement about positive and supportive actions going forward.

4. Follow up after the initial discussion.

Has the behaviour changed? Gotten better? Or worse? Determine whether a follow-up discussion is needed. Determine whether a follow-up discussion will have any impact. Decide if you want to continue to confront the difficult person by yourself. Become a peacemaker.

5. Confront your difficult coworker's behaviour publicly.

Deal with the person with gentle humour or slight sarcasm. Or, make an exaggerated physical gesture, such as a salute or place your hand over your heart to indicate a serious wounding.

You can also tell the difficult person that you'd like him or her to consider important history in their decision making or similar words expressed positively, depending on the subject. Direct confrontation does work well for some people in some situations. I don't think it works to ask the person to stop doing what he or she is doing, publicly, but you can employ more positive confrontational tactics. The person's success for you will depend on your ability to pull them off. Each of us is not spur-of-the-moment funny, but if you are, you can use the humor well with difficult people.



References

About: Human Resources. (2006). Retrieved December 21, 2006, from http://humanresources.about.com/od/workrelationships/a/difficultpeople_3.htm