



Working With Difficult People

8.5 Principles to Resolving Differences

"I'd pay more for someone that can get along with others than any other skill." John D. Rockefeller

According to a recent survey on the American workplace, 58% of workers say they like their co-workers. That means 42% are in a dissatisfying relationship with one or more of their team mates. The formula for business profitability reads: Favorable Work Relations = Favorable Working Conditions = Increased Profits. But some times relationships are strained because of one or more difficult personalities on the job.

I've worked in two companies where individuals were being so difficult, it affected every aspect of service. Both difficult people confided in me that they were behaving badly just to mess things up and see what they could get away with. To them this was a game. In both organizations, there was poor leadership at the top who feared reprimanding or disciplining them. One person can destroy a business. I and the other staff at both businesses suffered as these individuals did as they pleased - unchecked by weak management. Job performance goes down hill as everyone learns that there is no accountability. If you act promptly, though, you can make a difference. Remember these 8.5 Principles when Working With Difficult People:

1. Who you are will determine how you see others. We look at others through the lens of our own preferences and prejudices. Look at your own strengths and faults before passing judgment on others. My pastor says that every group has an "Extra Energy Required (E.E.R.) person;" one who requires extra energy to work with. If you don't know who yours is, it's probably you. John Maxwell uses the Bob principle. If Bob has a problem with John, and Bob has a problem with Bill, and Bob has a problem with Jane. It's Bob. Bob is the problem. Remember that with one minor exception, the world is entirely composed of other people. You need to learn how to get along with them, and get them to put up with you!

2. Know what pushes your buttons. You give off signals that tell where your

weak spots and vulnerabilities lie. Believe it or not you've been broadcasting these signals your entire life. I guarantee you that most difficult people already know what pushes your button and are probably using it in your relationship to get the upper hand. Get the jump on them before they take advantage of you any further. Know yourself best. Difficult people are like sandpaper. They rub on us and smooth out our rough edges. Each person you encounter can teach you something. Ask, "What is the lesson, or growth I need from this relationship?" If you always believe and look for the best in people, you will find lessons to be learned and growth will occur in even the worst relationships. Which leads to...

3 . Always *THINK* before you act or speak. Greg Surratt, Pastor of Seacoast Church in Mt. Pleasant, SC uses this acrostic for watching your language.

T - Is it True? Is what you are saying factual?

H - Is it Helpful? Does it lift others up or bring them down?

I - Is it Inspiring? Can it take others with you on the success journey?

N- Is it Necessary? Does it need to be said?

K - Is it Kind? Is it something you want to be remembered for saying?

Remember this, what ever you take in is what comes out when your button gets pushed.

4. Recognize that you can't please everyone. As I said earlier, one person can destroy a business. Don't let them destroy you. I've worked in situations where there were difficult people who admittedly set out to destroy the organization, just to have their own way. The lack of back-boned leadership allowed them to run roughshod over the entire company. Abraham Lincoln said, "You can please some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time. But you can't please all of the people all of the time." Here was man whose entire Presidency was defined in war. Yet he knew how to choose the best advisors and how to bring out the best in some of the most difficult people. Sometimes he would have to replace some individuals who would not go along with his vision, but he had the guts to make a decision and stick with it, even at the risk of his own career.

5. Don't get drawn in to arguments. Hurting people usually hurt people, and themselves. The more you understand their hurt and where the pain is, the more likely you are to avoid that wound. Choose your battles and your battlefields. Learn when and where to respond. Know your strengths and your weaknesses so you know how to avoid needless arguments. Arguing is usually the difficult person's home field and they have the advantage. There's an old saying in the South Georgia that goes: "If you wrestle in the mud with a pig you'll both get muddy... and the pig will like it!" Just the same if you argue with a difficult person you'll both get bloody and the other person just might enjoy it. And that leads to...

6. If possible resolve conflicts quickly and privately. Don't give a difficult person a forum to air their grievances or attitude. You only draw others in to a situation that can quickly escalate. Conflicts are a risk, but I've found that people

are worth the risk. Avoid these most common mistakes made in conflict: Failing to line up the facts; being vague about the offense; failing to hear the other person's side of the story; not keeping good records; harboring a grudge and confronting while angry. Separate what is fact from what is personal and stay with the facts. Like Michael Corleone says in *The Godfather*, "It's not personal, it's business." Okay, don't go and have your adversaries rubbed out, but learn to confront with confidence. Don't let unresolved conflicts fester.

7. Respond in kindness. Give others what they need - not what they deserve. And always give the benefit of the doubt. Use what John Maxwell calls the 101% Principle. Find the one percent you agree on and give it 100 percent of your effort. Find ways to communicate in a non-threatening manner that will disarm an aggressive person. Use your communication skills to discover the areas you agree on and foster a mutual relationship of agreement. Winning together always follows working together. The only place that is not true is in the dictionary. You always go to a higher level when you take others with you.

8. Go to school on relationships. Harvard Business School says the Number One tool for dealing with difficult people is effective communication skills. Being savvy. How can you stave off outbursts between team members, as well as conduct disciplinary conversations that lead to improved behavior? Training in behavioral and communication skills should be a requirement in every organization that seeks to profit in the marketplace. Use tools like the DiSC® Personal Profile System®. DiSC® is a multi-level learning instrument that helps individuals assess to what degree they utilize each dimension of behavior in a situation. Train in communication and behavioral skills that will increase productivity and performance in all levels of your organization.

R. Brayton Bowen produced "Anger in the Workplace", a five-part documentary for Public Radio in the early '90's. Bowen interviewed scores of people from authorities on employee attitudes to victims of downsizing, discrimination, even attempted homicide. He concluded that investing in training and development; focusing on assertive communications models, supervisory skills, and human relations training. Train from top to bottom - not just the subordinates. Management **MUST** be involved or the "revolution" (the anger) will turn on them. I've never led a group through a DiSC® seminar that hasn't immediately improved.

8.5 Above all, carry a positive image of yourself with you at all times.

Remember that you are valuable and don't deserve cruel treatment. If you hold a mirror up to a teenager and ask them what they see, most of the time, they will usually respond with a self-deprecating, negative comment. My daughter started Middle School this year and while I feel her pain as a parent, I am so thankful I don't have to go through that experience again. The older kids can be very cruel to the 6th graders. She comes home frequently hurting from what some ill-meaning child has said to her on the bus or in the hallway. I soothe her pain, but

tell her that she shouldn't let others define who she is. Only she can do that and become a whole, self-aware individual.

The sad truth is that if you hold that same mirror up to an adult, you will receive the same results. It is sad we never learned these truths growing up. Your response to negative, difficult people will say a lot about how you view yourself. Be secure in your identity and you will be surprised as to how less difficult the relationships you fear will become. Your value lies in what you think of yourself. Others, difficult people in particular, will set their standards of you by the value you define for yourself.

Permission is granted to reprint this article provided the following paragraph is included in full:

Jim Mathis, CSP is an international Certified Speaking Professional, executive coach and trainer. To subscribe to his free personal and professional development newsletter, please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group, please call 888-688-0220, or visit his web site: www.jimmathis.com.