

Handling Difficult People

By Scott Henderson

Let's face it, difficult people and situations are part of life. An employee can't get along with their boss. A bully at work is pressuring you into doing their work. You and your business partner are arguing about money. You and your spouse have the same arguments over and over.

Most people try to ignore the problem and hope it will go away. Waiting and worrying not only doesn't resolve the problem, it causes you stress and shortens your life span. Attacking the person doesn't work either. Emotions like anger or rage, only serve to exacerbate the problem, to damage the relationship further and make you look bad.

So what is the solution?

The Best Solution Is to Confront Difficult People

When you face and resolve the problem yourself, you will feel great. You are suddenly in control of your life. Not only will you have you been able to resolve the problem, you will have overcome your fear. There are few things more satisfying than confronting someone who is difficult, dealing with the conflict and getting a positive outcome.

Dealing With A Confrontation

The key for dealing with difficult people is preparation. You need to get organised, stay objective, gather your evidence and come up with a plan. If you are able to follow these six steps you will be able to handle difficult people in your life.

1. Make the decision to address the person directly and by yourself.

This sounds easy but for many people this is the most difficult step. You have to remember there are consequences if you say something, there are consequences if you do not. So speak to the person face to face – do not do it via email!

2. Identify exactly what the problem is and what you would like to see as a resolution.

Many people don't even know what they are upset about. Stay objective and write it down. Try to be specific and focus on behaviours and not concepts.

E.g.:

"Joe is refusing to pay me despite our agreement."

"Chris is hurting office morale and causing me stress with her constant complaining about the new changes."

"Bob is supposedly telling people that my work is inferior and I am dishonest."

Once you have specifically identified the problem, write down a goal for the meeting.
"By the end of the meeting, I want"

Examples of goals or objectives you might want as a result of a confrontation:

"Joe pays me in full."

"Chris stops complaining or leaves."

"Learn the truth about Bob's comments and if true, get him to stop it."

In some cases, your objective may also state:

"Figure out if I want this person as a partner/employee/boss/friend."

3. Gather your evidence and write down your side of the story.

What are the facts, reasons and explanations that you need the other person to understand? List the points in order of priority or importance.

For example, to get Joe to understand why he must pay you, you might make these points:

- A. Joe requested the service.
- B. Joe signed an agreement to pay for the service.
- C. We provided the service as promised.
- D. Joe was happy with the service.
- E. Etc.

4. Write down objections, reactions or disagreements the other person may have.

Include everything you are afraid might happen during the meeting. Putting specific concerns and fears in writing reduces their impact on you. Prepare a response or identify a possible solution for each. If you are prepared for possible objections you will be more confident and more likely to get a positive outcome.

5. Organise a meeting at a mutually convenient time and hold it where you will not be disturbed and preferably in a neutral place.

- A. Look the person directly in the eye.
- B. Explain the specific problem you want to resolve as you noted in Step 2.
- C. Go over your first point on the list from Step 3.
- D. Listen carefully to the other person and make certain they feel understood.
- E. Be assertive but not aggressive (don't react emotionally).
- F. Use your solutions to their reactions as you worked out in Step 4.
- G. Continue describing your points and listening to the other person's side.
- H. Do not give up. Communicate and persist for as long as it takes to reach agreement on a goal.

6. Follow up after the meeting.

Most people are so relieved that they have said something that they never want to revisit the issue. However sometimes this can change with time. Following up can help to create accountability to the agreed solution. If there is still an issue you can

address it in a calm and objective manner. And if the problem is resolved, this is a feel good for everybody and can only serve to strengthen the relationship.

The more you deal with confrontation and difficult people, the better you get at it, the easier it becomes and the greater your confidence and self esteem will be. Also the amount of time it takes to prepare for a future confrontation decreases. You will become strong and tough.

When you handle conflict and deal with everyone (even difficult people) in a way that is fair and reasoned, people will respect you for your courage, your honesty and your control. Maybe your colleagues, employees or co-workers may even follow your example and become more productive. Taking positive organised actions, despite fear, is the kind of courage all successful people must have to succeed.