

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Do any of you have difficult people in your lives? Have any of you had this experience: you pull into your parking lot at work and see **the car** that seems to bring a simultaneous reaction of discomfort in your stomach and your head? The car indicates that **he (she)** is already there. **He (she)** is that co-worker whose mission in life appears to be to make you miserable – and they are so good at it! Have you ever said, “I get 4 weeks vacation a year, 2 when I’m off, and 2 when **he (she)** is off?”

Or maybe the difficult person in your life is someone who reports to you, or a parent or in-law, a spouse or former spouse, a sibling, a child (teenage or adult), a neighbor, etc. And don’t forget those strangers on the highway, the theater, or in line at the store or the bank. It might even be possible that you or I (more likely you) might be considered a difficult person by other people in our lives! Since the odds are that we all have some difficult people to cope with in the workplace, in our family, in our neighborhood, or in our daily activities, the question becomes “How do we **deal** constructively with these difficult people?” **Suggestions for dealing constructively with difficult people:**

Respond, don’t react:

Stop and think, think and act. Think before you talk. Just because someone pushes your buttons doesn’t mean you have to lose your temper or your adult control of your behavior. Pause, breathe, and count (to 10, etc.), so you can **choose** what you’re going to do or say.

Analyze the situation:

Examine **exactly** what and whom you are dealing with - not your emotional reaction, but a clear-headed appraisal of the situation with which you are confronted.

Analyze your behavior:

Examine your part of the situation: what are you doing and saying?

- Are you **behaving according to your beliefs and values**, or are you reacting negatively “because they started it.” Is your behavior part of the problem, or part of the solution?
- Do you have this person and this situation in **perspective**? How important is this person and this situation to you, really? How much of this will you remember in 6 months? In a year?
- How much of a **priority** is this person and this situation in your life? Are you giving this person and this situation an appropriate amount of your time and energy – or much more than that – based on their priority in your life?
- Do you need to give yourself **permission** to address this person directly by confronting them privately, setting limits or let the situation go, and spend your time and energy on other matters?

Analyze who owns the situation:

- It’s important to pick our battles, and to spend our time and energy on issues that belong to us, or situations we can control or influence.
- If the situation is your business or if you choose to make it your business (you decide to “fight city hall” because you feel so strongly about it), then go into the **problem solving** mode.
- Calmly explore your choices in an open minded, creative, solution-focused fashion. Brainstorm as many positive choices as you can, reality-check them in terms of being practical, and rank order your choices in terms of achieving a positive outcome.

Examine the consequences of each of your choices:

- Explore the possible positive and negative consequences of each of your choices. Then select the choice that, all things considered, seems to be the best available at this time.