

### **MANAGING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS**

True professionals learn to keep calm especially in stressful, difficult situations. When others know they can count on you to get through the tough stuff, their opinion of you soars. Learn tips to handle the pressure and avoid the pitfalls such as office gossip and ego battles. Know when to assert yourself proactively and when to let go.

#### **TIPS**

- Stay calm and assume the best intentions.
- Concentrate on facts, not opinions.
- Interpret what the speaker is “saying” with body language, such as eye contact, tone of voice, facial expression, and posture.
- Monitor your own nonverbal communication and be aware of the messages you are sending with your body language.
- Try to put yourself in the speaker’s shoes. Identify what he or she wants and allow the person to vent.
- Harmonize with the person’s stress (pain/emotions). Use empathy to absorb the tension.
- Paraphrase the person’s comments and ask questions.
- Don’t overreact, become defensive, interrupt, argue, criticize, tolerate verbal abuse, or cast blame.

#### **AVOID GOSSIP AND BACKBITING**

It can be tempting to get caught up in office gossip and office politics. Most people want to feel included and part of the group, but be cautious about sharing personal information about yourself or others. Some of the information you share could be used against you in the future. Limit conversations to work-related or neutral topics. You should never discuss your salary or other confidential information with co-workers. People who avoid gossip and complaining are seen as more professional and are more likely to be trusted. Stay friendly and open and act appropriately.

#### **DIFFUSE CONFLICT**

A true professional knows how to handle and diffuse conflicts skillfully and picks battles carefully. Some issues are important to pursue and get resolved immediately. Other issues just need to be overlooked.

Often, conflicts are related to people’s work styles. You may be a conscientious, perfectionist type, preferring quiet time to carefully think through your work. Someone in your work area may be a more social type, wanting to verbalize her thinking. Rather than seeing her style as “wrong,” try to view it as different from yours. Her behavior may annoy you because it interferes with your desire for quiet, but she is not personally “out to get you.”

Talk with her about style differences and needs. See if you can work out an agreement to allow for both quiet time and social time. Just becoming aware of your differences can ease the tension and help you both be more sensitive to each other's needs.

**Take a complimentary communication style assessment quiz at [www.MManning.com](http://www.MManning.com). Fill it out about yourself or a “difficult” person to get some specific tips on how to handle them.**

## **INTERACT EFFECTIVELY WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE**

No matter where you work, you will encounter difficult people. Difficult people cause stress for those around them. You may be tempted to avoid these individuals and hope they will go away. It takes time and skill to deal with them, but once you know how to handle a difficult personality, you may gain that person's respect as well as the respect of your co-workers. Top professionals do not avoid difficult people and situations. They discover what the difficult person needs and try different techniques to skillfully handle the situation.

There are seven difficult personality types. Each has unique annoying behaviors.

### *Seven Difficult Personalities*

1. **Negators** – They are suspicious of authority figures and constantly criticize them. They think their way is the only way and reject others' ideas.

**TIP:** Ask them to express their criticism openly, rather than covertly. Seek input from other participants and practice group problem solving.

2. **Agreeables** – Their strong need to be liked makes them a “yes” person. They don't know when to say no or voice an opposing thought.

**TIP:** Be careful what you delegate to them. Make sure they have enough time and resources. Ask them to give a positive and a negative when you ask their opinion about an issue.

3. **Cry-babies** – They act and feel powerless and defeated and think that everything that happens to them is bad.

**TIP:** Have them list all the negatives then brainstorm solutions together. Encourage them to take small positive actions.

4. **Snipers** – They use sarcasm and use verbal barbs to put people down, often behind the scenes.

**TIP:** Confront them with direct questions and get them to express their opinions

in a public forum. Find ways to use them for positive roles in team meetings, like being the recorder or timekeeper.

5. **Withdrawns** – They keep to themselves and seldom express their feelings or thoughts. They avoid participation and teamwork.

**TIP:** When you delegate to them, follow up with lots of face-to-face brief meetings. Ask them questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” Try to pair them up with others on projects or encourage teamwork.

6. **Arrogants** – They are self-centered and think they know more than others. Some of them do have real expertise, but seem to lord it over others.

**TIP:** Acknowledge their expertise and let them shine when appropriate. Don’t be intimidated by their condescending attitude or tone of voice.

7. **Bulldozers** – They express themselves forcefully, are often angry, and need to vent. They also have a strong need to control.

**TIP:** Stay calm and be willing to hear them out. Let them vent as long as it’s not abusive. Restate their concerns. After they calm down, ask for their input on some possible solutions.

Were these tips useful to you?

Find these and many more tips in Dr. Manning and Patricia Haddock’s new book, *Developing as a Professional*.

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To build a reputation as a professional takes more than technical skill. Professionals know how to dress appropriately, communicate skillfully, and maintain good relationships with their customers, co-workers, and superiors. They also gain recognition and get ahead faster. *Developing as a Professional* gives readers a refresher course on the basics of proper etiquette and good manners in business and social situations, and is also a how-to-guide to projecting a competent and responsible image in the workplace. Fifty tips cover everything from scheduling time effectively to managing meetings efficiently, and even give advice for coping with challenges such as defusing conflict and managing pressure and stress. This brand new Crisp Fifty-Minute book is ideal for people just entering the workforce, technical workers who need to polish their social skills, or employees who have been promoted to positions requiring more interaction with others.

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Dr. Marilyn Manning, CSP, CMC, and international author of seven business books, resolves difficult people problems. She specializes in Leadership, Teamwork, Conflict Mediation, Executive Coaching, Meeting Facilitation, Strategic Planning, and Communication. 82% of Dr. Manning's work is repeat business.

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Next month's *Leadership Tips* will feature information on change.

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