



## ***Tool #6 - Part A***

### ***Dealing With Difficult People at Work***

#### ***Part A Includes:***

***Lesson***

***Quiz***

***Goal Setting***

(Each tool is presented in a 2 part lesson format.  
Part B will follow in two weeks)

Customer Support: [Harriet@ConfidenceCenter.com](mailto:Harriet@ConfidenceCenter.com)  
[www.ConfidenceCenter.com](http://www.ConfidenceCenter.com)

***Employee Success Toolkit***  
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***Dealing With Difficult People at Work***

At one time or another, almost everyone must deal with difficult people at work. Difficult people come in many styles. They may either be cranky individuals, openly aggressive, subtle sneak attackers, negative complainers, or they may go to the other extreme and drive you crazy with their silence. Have you ever wondered why some people are difficult to work with?

“Individuals behave in a difficult manner because they have learned that doing so keeps others off balance and incapable of effective action. Worst of all, they appear immune to all the usual methods of communication and persuasion designed to convince them or help them to change their ways,” says Robert M. Bramson, Ph.D. in his book, *Coping With Difficult People*.

**Cranky People**

When dealing with cranky people, try to determine what is the real message the person is telling you. Are you any part of the problem? Is there something you can change about your own behavior?

While some people at work may be purposefully cranky because it helps them get their own way, for others, crankiness is simply a reflection of their own inner turmoil. In either case, don't remain silent. In a neutral tone of voice, agree with any part of the cranky person's statement that may be true, even if other parts of the statement are false. In a neutral tone of voice say, “I don't like to be talked to in that way because it sounds. . . angry, unkind, disrespectful, etc. Would you please speak to me in a calmer tone of voice?”

**The Aggressive Personality**

Stand up to them, but don't fight. These overly aggressive people expect others to either run away from them or react with rage. Your goal is simply to assertively express your own views, not turn the situation into a battle of right and wrong.

First wait for them to run out of some steam. Then call the hostile person by his or her name, and assert your own opinions with confidence. An example of this might be, “ Mr. Jones, I disagree with you.” “Mary, you interrupted me. We can discuss my proposal after you listen to it.”

After you have stood up to the aggressive person, he or she may gain some respect for you and actually extend the hand of friendship.

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#### **Subtle Snipers**

These difficult people are experts in pot shots and sneak attacks in subtle ways such as humorous put downs, sarcastic tones of voice, disapproving looks, and innuendoes. You may feel uncomfortable replying to them because you don't like confrontation. This, however, allows the sniper to get away with his covert hostility.

Respond to the Sniper with a question. *"That sounds like you're making fun of me. Are you?" "What are you trying to tell me with that look?" "Did you really mean what you said?"* A sniper usually replies to his pot shots with either denial, *"I'm only joking"* or volleying the responsibility onto you, *"You're so serious. Can't you take a joke?"* Nevertheless, the fact that you've questioned the covert attack will lessen the chance for similar attacks in the future

#### **The Complainer**

These are fearful people who have little faith in themselves and others because they believe in a hostile world. Their constant discouragement and complaining can bring everyone to despair. Don't try to argue these difficult people out of their negativity. Instead, respond with your own optimistic expectations.

#### **The Silent Personality**

People who walk right past you ignoring you as if you didn't exist, people who give you sullen looks, and people who respond to every question with either, *"I don't know"* or silence, are difficult because they are timid. Like turtles, they retreat into their shells to avoid conflict and responsibility.

Silent people get away with not talking because most people are uncomfortable with silence, and are too quick to fill in the gaps. Ask them about ideas that *can't* be answered with just a "yes" or "no", such as:

- *"What are you trying to tell me with your silence?"*
- *"Would you please help me understand the problem you're facing?"*
- *"Why is it uncomfortable for you to reply to my suggestions?"*

Then wait at least one full minute before you say anything. This long silence may make them uncomfortable enough to say something. If they do start talking, listen carefully, and don't interrupt them.

If the silent person won't respond at all, end the impasse by setting another date to discuss the matter. *"It's obvious that we aren't making any progress at this time. However, this matter is important to me. Let's meet again on Friday afternoon at four-o'clock."*

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**Five “Don’ts” In Dealing With Difficult People**

1. Don’t take the difficult person’s behavior personally. “A difficult person’s troublesome behavior is habitual and affects most of the people with whom he comes in contact,” says Bramson.
2. Don’t make excuses for the difficult person’s behavior. Think of the countless other people who have faced adversity and have not become difficult people.
3. Don’t fight back or try to beat them at their own game. They have been practicing their skills for a long time, and you are a beginner in comparison.
4. Don’t try to appease them. Difficult people have an insatiable appetite for more.
5. Don’t try to change the difficult person. It won’t work. We can only change our responses to their behavior.

Dealing with difficult people takes practice, so do not get discouraged. Although these strategies will not change the difficult person, they will break his or her ability to interfere with your effectiveness. It’s not easy to change personality traits. However, you will be standing up for yourself in a compassionate and respectful manner. Most important, you will feel more confident, and you will be able to enjoy your workdays.

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*Expert quoted:*

Robert M. Bramson, Ph.D. author of, *Coping With Difficult People*, published by Dell Publishing A division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. 1981

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***Tool #6 - Quiz***  
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Complete the quiz, and give the answers to your supervisor.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. How can you respond to a person referred to as a “sniper?”

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2. What is the personality type referred to as “complainers?”

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3. Why is it difficult to deal with a “silent” co-worker?

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4. How should you handle a cranky co-worker?

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5. Name 3 ways in which you can deal with difficult people.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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***Tool #6 - Your Goals for***  
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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

What are your 3 main goals for this month for dealing with difficult people at work?  
Make a copy of this to give to your supervisor, and keep one for yourself.  
Post your goals in your workplace where you can easily see them.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

In two weeks you will receive Part B of this lesson. It will contain:

- The 7 key points from this lesson to refresh your memory, and
- A place for you to record your progress toward your goals.

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***Additional Resources***

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***[www.ConfidenceCenter.com](http://www.ConfidenceCenter.com)***

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**Email Newsletter:**

**Employee Morale and Confidence Tips**

It has creative ideas you can use every week to keep up morale.

Sign up for Free at [www.ConfidenceCenter.com](http://www.ConfidenceCenter.com)

**Assessments:**

Are you happy at work? Take the [Employee Morale Assessment](#)

How confident are you? Take the [Confidence Quiz](#)

**Articles and Past Newsletters**

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Special days you can celebrate for every month of the year.

**Fun Zone:**

Jokes, cartoons, and more - when you just need a break.

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Telephone coaching by our certified professional coach. To get one *free* coaching session.

Details at <http://www.confidencecenter.com/serv06.htm>

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