

DIFFICULT CO-WORKERS

Dealing with unprofessional colleagues is frustrating and might even affect your work performance. Learn how to cope with problematic behavior and, most importantly, remain calm. By taking action immediately, you might be able to avoid a conflict before it ever becomes a situation!



Ten Tips for Dealing with Difficult Co-Workers

Difficult people exist at work as in all facets of life, and they come in every variety. Dealing with these types is easier when the person is just generally obnoxious or when their behavior affects more than one person. But it is much tougher when they personally attack you or undermine your professional standing. While you probably can't change such a person, the good news is that by following these 10 tips for dealing with problem people in the workplace, you can avoid being their victim:

Identify problem people. Learn to recognize when a co-worker is "toxic." Difficult people come in all shapes and sizes: Some talk constantly and never listen. Others must always have the last word. Some co-workers fail to keep commitments. Others criticize anything that they did not create themselves. A toxic co-worker can take the form of a cut-you-downer, a two-faced backstabber, a gossip, a meddler, an instigator or a nasty competitor.

Beware bad bosses. Bosses are in charge, whether you like it or not. If your intention is to keep your job, you will have to learn how to get along with an arrogant or controlling boss. If you need to confront your boss, avoid putting him or her on the defensive. This is the most risky situation with which to deal.

Assess your situation. Initially, you might be shocked that you are being treated unprofessionally. Take a deep breath, and try to understand exactly what is happening to you. Realize that you are not alone.

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Take concrete action. Once you are fully aware of what is happening, deciding to live with the situation long-term is rarely an option. Your situation won't improve unless you do something about it. In fact, left unaddressed, it usually gets worse. Let the co-worker in question know that you are on to his or her game and that you will escalate it to a higher authority if necessary.

Don't let the problem fester. Make sure to take action swiftly. You may eventually become so angry that your efforts to address the situation could become irrational. It's far better to tackle the problem while you can maintain some objectivity and emotional control.

Safeguard your reputation. Constant complaining about the situation can quickly earn you the title of "office whiner." Managers might wonder why you're unable to solve your own problems, even if their tolerance of the situation is part of the problem. If you are embroiled in a constant conflict at work, you may end up getting blamed for other problems.

Don't sink to their level. As problematic as the person may be, there are many dysfunctional approaches to dealing with them in which you do not want to engage. Some no-no's: sending anonymous notes, gossiping about the person, bad-mouthing him or her to the boss.

Keep it private. Be sure to keep all of your dealings with the person private. Never lose your temper at work or engage in a confronta-

tion in front of your boss or colleagues.

Make the first move. If you approach a difficult person with the belief that he or she is as eager as you are to restore harmony, you can make the first move. Start your conversation with statements such as "I'm sorry for what I may have done to hurt you" or "I could be wrong."

Agree to disagree. If you personally dislike a co-worker or boss, you can still learn from their opinions, viewpoints and ideas. If you can find something to appreciate about them, comment on it in a favorable way. If that person senses your allegiance, they will be naturally drawn to you, and you may both learn to get along despite your differences.

Source: AllBusiness.com, Inc., www.allbusiness.com/human-resources/workforce-management-conflict-resolution/11133-1.html.

Coping with Unpleasant Colleagues

In many office environments, employees have less than collegial relationships, a new survey shows. Twenty-nine percent of respondents recently surveyed said they work with someone who is rude or unprofessional on the job. Of those, 68 percent felt co-workers frequently behave badly – and not just to the people who report to them. More than half (59 percent) of all workers surveyed said their boorish colleagues are equal-opportunity offenders, upsetting subordinates, peers and superiors alike. The survey was developed by OfficeTeam, a staffing service specializing in the placement of administrative professionals.

Although nobody likes working with someone who is inconsiderate or unkind, the survey suggests those who have been in the workforce the longest may have built up immunity to bad behavior. Among respondents, 35 percent of those aged 65 or older said inconsiderate co-workers should be tolerated as long as they are good at their jobs.

The following are the most common types of difficult co-workers, and OfficeTeam's tips for coping with them:

The Belittler: Belittlers routinely tear others down in order to build themselves up. Put-downs, demeaning remarks and disparaging comments are common trademarks of this person.

Coping strategy: Your confidence is the Belittler's weakness, and he or she will back off if you stand up for yourself. Try refuting a Belittler's criticism by asserting yourself, using facts where possible.

The Credit Thief: Insecure about their status, Credit Thieves boldly steal your ideas and grab the glory when a project is successful. Curiously, they're nowhere to be found when things go wrong.

Coping strategy: Keep a written record of your activities and accomplishments. Give your manager regular status reports about the projects you're working on, and don't hesitate to correct misperceptions.

The Saboteur: Saboteurs have a knack for leaving colleagues in the lurch. Similar to the Belittler, they like to make others look bad. Their tactics aren't always overt, so you may not realize you're working with a Saboteur until a critical deadline arrives. Then, you find you're unable to complete your part of the project because the Saboteur has withheld important information.

Coping strategy: Be sure your supervisor or project manager knows the roles and responsibilities of each team member, and insist on regular progress reports so that Saboteurs can't take advantage of lapses in oversight.

The Rumormonger: Rumormongers like drama and often spread half-truths or lies by talking behind others' backs. This is an especially dangerous type of co-worker because he or she has the ability to tarnish your reputation.

Coping strategy: The best defense is to avoid engaging in any kind of gossip – remember that anything you say can be held against you. If the Rumormonger starts swapping stories with you, say only good things about your colleagues and excuse yourself as quickly as possible.

The Slacker: This person may try to pass off tasks to other staff members. The Slacker often claims he or she is "too busy" to help out yet will make time for water cooler chats and Web surfing during office hours.

Coping strategy: Be sure this person carries his or her weight on project teams by documenting the responsibilities of each member of the group and asking for regular status reports. Hold everyone accountable for their portion of the project, and be firm with deadlines.

Source: OfficeTeam, Oct. 16, 2007, www.iaap-hq.org/OfficeTeam_CareerCenter/Co-worker_Woes.htm.



How to Deal With Argumentative Colleagues

Some people are just naturally argumentative. You say black and they say white. You say go and they say stop. Dealing with argumentative colleagues is frustrating and can affect your work. There are many effective ways to cope with argumentative colleagues without becoming argumentative yourself.

Step 1 Stay calm. Don't get drawn into the argument by getting worked up. Staying calm will also help you think and speak clearly.

Step 2 Listen intently. Tune out the argumentative words and focus on the point your colleague is trying to make.

Step 3 Keep it professional. This is your work environment. Keep your statements and behavior professional, even if your colleague isn't.

Step 4 Think carefully before you speak. This will help to prevent the argument from getting personal and help make certain that you state your point clearly.

Step 5 Speak in a calm and composed manner. This ensures that you will not compound the argument by your tone of voice or body language. Argumentative people often feed off the person with which they are arguing. If you speak in a calm and composed manner, maybe he/she will as well.

Step 6 Know when to walk away. If the discussion is getting nowhere, walk away and revisit the issue later.

Source: eHow, Inc., www.ehow.com/how_2050643_deal-argumentative-colleagues.html.

Co-Worker from Hell? Five Ways to Deal

Stress comes in all shapes and forms. And it's not just deadlines that can make you want to pull your hair out – the people you work with also play a major role in your frustration level. Not getting along with a co-worker means you have to face the stress of it day in and day out. There's no escaping the people you spend 40 hours a week with.

Fortunately, there are tricks to getting around the situation. You'd be surprised how much you can do to change a difficult co-worker into a manageable, and perhaps even likeable, one.

Don't waste energy having a mental breakdown on account of someone you can't stand. Instead, practice these five tips to make it through your work day in spite of a co-worker who rubs you the wrong way:

Dealing with Difficult Co-Workers Tip #1: Be Prepared for Conflict

The best way to deal with a problem is to see it coming before it invades your cubicle. If you work closely or otherwise deal regularly with an argumentative co-worker, anticipate ahead of time how you're going to handle the situation. When you're unprepared, you're likely to react instinctively to your anger and annoyance with childish behavior that accomplishes nothing. This will only succeed in making a bad situation worse.

Sometimes it helps to practice a debate before it actually happens. Stage a likely conflict in your mind and work through the various scenarios. First, allow yourself to act immature and listen to how foolish you sound. Does name-calling and performance-bashing make you the better person? No.

Next, play the part of the professional. Instead of having a witty comeback to every snide remark, act like a grown up and aim to resolve the conflict. Just don't be stodgy.

And above all, don't make these mistakes...

The Dos and Don'ts of Debate:

- Don't be wishy-washy. Do uphold your morals and values.
- Don't be arrogant. Do be self-confident.
- Don't be unreachable. Do be willing to compromise.
- Don't let him/her get under your skin. Do recognize cheap shots for what they are – an attempt to get you to sink to that level.



Dealing with Difficult Co-Workers Tip #2: Don't Fuel the Fire

You're going to be tempted to retaliate – to lash out at a hostile co-worker with equally low blows. This is the worst thing you can do. People who instigate confrontation and cause tension also thrive on controversy. Any exchange of negative words fuels their malice and makes them feel powerful. And if you stoop to their level, you're opening the door for them to make you look like the bad guy.

Instead, use the oldest trick in the book: Kill 'em with kindness. It's the ultimate ammunition for fighting off irrational people. They will either end up too frustrated or too bored, eventually becoming weary of engaging in debate with you.

Once they back off, you can focus on what you get paid to do – work.

Dealing with Difficult Co-workers Tip #3: Lend a Helping Hand

Although not beneficial in all situations, sometimes a difficult person is simply a troubled soul looking for an ally. Unfortunately, this co-worker ends up making enemies instead of friends because they don't have the necessary social skills.

Negative behavior is often the hallmark of a person who's dealing with a whole lot more than they let on. Maybe it's money problems, marital issues, health concerns or all of the above. Bullying is a shield to protect what's vulnerable and fragile inside. Break down that barrier and you may find someone who could use a friend.

And once you've crossed enemy lines and become comrades, this person may become aware of their downfalls and look to you for advice. Lead by example so as not to spend all your time pointing the finger at their problems.

Dealing with Difficult Co-Workers Tip #4: Get a Third Party Involved

No matter how competent and wonderful a person you are, you just can't win everyone over. If a difficult co-worker is not receptive to your attempts at defusing the situation, enlist a neutral third-party to help navigate the choppy waters. They can act as a sounding board for both parties' frustrations and work with you to find common ground.

But don't pull someone into the argument thinking he or she will automatically side with you. In fact, be prepared to answer tough questions such as, "How are you contributing to the problem?" Maybe you'll discover that your toxic co-worker isn't the only difficult person around – you might be one, too!

Come with an open mind, be prepared to compromise and always keep your goal in mind – to get along, put the pettiness aside and work as a team.

Dealing with Difficult Co-Workers Tip #5: Move On

You tried to make nice, and it just didn't work. There comes a point where you have to hang up your hat and admit that the situation just isn't going to resolve itself.

If you can honestly say you gave it your best shot and you're still stuck with a disruptive co-worker, it's not worth the stress to work day in and day out in a combative environment. So whether it's them or you who move on, somebody needs to.

This is especially true if your work is negatively affected because of this person. You basically have four options: move yourself to a different department, move him/her to a different department, find a new job or let him/her go (if you have that kind of say in the situation). Sometimes difficult people make it tough for everyone – not just you – lowering productivity across the board. And in a company where productivity is paramount, that's plenty reason for dismissal.

There's no point in giving someone the power to determine whether you're going to have a good or a bad day at work.

Source: LifeScript.com, www.lifescript.com/channels/healthy_living/Life_Tips/dealing_with_difficult_co-workers.asp?page=1.