



**YOU GET
ON MY
NERVES.**

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PERSONALITIES

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This session will address practical behaviors and emotional survival skills designed to ease the pain of close encounters that cannot be avoided.

Objectives:

- discuss various “difficult” personality types
- learn how to handle difficult relationships proactively rather than reactively
- choose new behaviors when dealing with someone you don’t like
- develop a plan of action for effective interactions, regardless of personalities

What is a difficult personality trait that you currently deal with in your work or personal life?

(No names, please.)

Why Should we Bother?

- Personal benefits**
- Professional benefits**
- Organizational benefits**

The Eight Most Unwanted List:

(developed by Brinkman and Kirschner, *Dealing with People You Can't Stand*)

1. **Tanks.** They are pushy and aggressive because they want to get things done. Attacks by Tanks usually feel personal, even though they usually aren't, and they evoke very emotional reactions.

Action Plan: Stay cool, look the Tank in the eye and hold your ground. If the situation demands a response, you can politely interrupt and briefly give your point of view by saying, "The way I see it ...". You'll rarely win a war of words with Tanks, but you can gain their respect with an assertive, yet controlled, demeanor.

2. **Snipers.** They use sarcastic comments to embarrass you. Snipers want to get things done and feel thwarted when something or somebody gets in their way.

Action Plan: Snipers need to be pulled out of hiding. At the meeting, you should stop and say to the Sniper, "Did you have a comment for the group?" Your voice should convey curiosity, but should not convey anger or sarcasm.

3. **Know-It-Alls.** Their behavioral intent is to get things done and they know exactly how to do everything. Their endless arguments and dedication to detail can drive you crazy. Because Know-It-Alls need to be right, they want to control all situations and view alternative ideas as a challenge to their knowledge and abilities. For the most part, they are very smart and competent, which makes it even harder to get them to listen to your point of view.

Action Plan: Know-It-Alls won't listen to you until they are sure you understand their brilliant thinking. You'll have to repeat their ideas out loud or they will keep telling you the same thing over and over again. It is often helpful to present your thoughts in an indirect manner by saying something like, "Perhaps we might consider ..."

4. **Think-They-Know-It-Alls.** They want attention and appreciation, which is why they are eager to offer opinions. They know just enough about a subject to speak up, but oftentimes their logic is faulty, and they are prone to exaggerations and half-truths. Public humiliation, however, is not a good idea..

Action Plan: Assume positive intent (that they really want to help solve a problem). When they get out of hand, however, you have to stop them. For example, if Mary is prone to generalizations ("Everybody agrees that this method ..."), then ask her, "Who specifically ...?" When you ask for specific back-up information, treat them with respect and pay attention to their good ideas, they may lessen their grandstanding behavior.

5. **Grenades.** Tanks explode to get something done, but Grenades explode because they aren't getting respect and approval. They seem to save up their anger and their blowups are unpredictable.

Action Plan: When Grenades detonate, you have to stay calm and take control of the situation. You'll have to get their attention by interrupting the tantrum and may have to raise your voice so they will hear you. Show concern as you try to calm them down. The important issue: find out what is pulling out the Grenade's pin so you can prevent future explosions.

6. **Yes People.** They overcommit because they can't say no, and they can't say no because they want to get along with everyone. When the work doesn't get done and co-workers get angry, Yes People feel terrible and then become resentful because everyone expects so much from them.

Action Plan: You need to get commitments you can count on and that won't happen unless you develop an open, honest line of communication. Yes People are usually disorganized and poor planners so help them manage their time and set realistic goals.

7. **No People.** Brinkman and Kirschner sum them up: "More deadly to morale than a speeding bullet, more powerful than hope, able to defeat big ideas with a single syllable." They always zero in on why plans won't work and why mistakes are inevitable.

Action Plan: Push them to become more positive and they will only become more negative. Thus, assume positive intent (they want to get a job done right) and try not to let them drag you down. View them as an early warning system and pick through their criticisms to see if any have merit.

8. **Whiners.** Their bag of woes is overflowing. Like the No People, Whiners want to get everything done right but nothing ever turns out as well as it should. Since they feel hopeless to change anything, they just get better and better at complaining.

Action Plan: Grit your teeth and listen to them. If you can identify what's ailing them, you can try to find solutions. Get them to be definitive about complaints and ask specific questions to resolve problems: "What do you need to improve the situation?" If you turn the Whiner into a problem solver, the feeling of hopelessness should diminish.

Which of these personality types do you interact with most often?

Which specific strategy can you implement to enhance the interaction?

Managing My Reaction:

- Reactive v Proactive

Can you recall a recent incident when you were reactive? Did someone say or do something that you reacted to it and then immediately regretted your response?



Reactive – People or Circumstances determine my reaction.

ALTERNATIVE:

Proactive - When I exercise my power to choose my response.



Think of a situation in which you can choose to be proactive, rather than reactive. How would being proactive impact the situation?

- Operate from your Circle of Control and Influence.

We can only control ourselves (our attitude and our behaviors). We can begin increase the effectiveness of our interactions when we work from our circle of influence.



Circle of Control/Influence Behaviors:

a. Model successful communicators. When face-to-face with your difficult person, having a role model helps. Think of someone in your organization/community that gets along well with your difficult person; find out the secrets of that successful arrangement.

b. Pick Your Battles. Before you do anything, decide if the annoying habit is important enough to warrant a conversation, says the author of *The Complete Idiots Guide to Dealing with Difficult Employees*. Is the habit disrupting work or impacting productivity? Or, does it not bother anyone other than me? If it is just a personal nuisance, **then let it go.**

c. Embrace It. Tom Peters said, “Actively recruit people who are freaks, misfits, outcasts and different and hire them to work in your organization.”

How to Get Along...

- * Be proactive
- * Listen intently
- * Identify your personal triggers
- * Paraphrase or ask for clarification
- * Explore options with an open mind
- * Take a time-out to regroup



Personal Plan of Action:

The skill I most need to implement is:

If I could only remember one thing from this discussion, it would be: