

# How to Deal With Difficult People

A seminar with Dr Lionel Hartley



**Program: Irrational Beliefs; Types of Difficult People; Choices and Options; Positive Influence Skills; Assertive Communication; Question Time**



Full transcript  
of presentation notes,  
PowerPoint Slides  
& Handouts

# Notes for **How to Deal with Difficult People**

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## Slide 1 – FOCUS

## Slide 2 – Title Slide with music

## Slide 3 – Communication

President to Vice President:

Next Thursday, Halley's Comet will appear over this area. This is an event that occurs only once every 75 years. Call the deans and have them assemble their professors and students on the athletic field and explain this phenomena to them. If it rains, cancel the observation and have the classes meet in the gym to see a film about the comet.

## Slide 4 – Communication

Vice President to Deans:

By order of the President, next Thursday Halley's comet will appear over the athletic field. If it rains, cancel classes and report to the gym with your professors and students where you will be shown a film, a phenomena which occurs only once every 75 years.

## Slide 5 – Communication

Deans to Professors:

By order of the Phenomenal President, next Thursday Halley's Comet will appear in the gym. In case of rain over the athletic field, the President will give another order, something that occurs once every 75 years.

## Slide 6 – Communication

Professors to Students:

Next Thursday, the President will appear in the gym with Halley's Comet, something which occurs every 75 years. If it rains, the President will cancel the comet and order us all to our phenomenal athletic field.

## Slide 7 – Communication

Student writing to parents:

When it rains next Thursday over the school athletic field, the phenomenal 75 year-old President will cancel all classes and appear before the whole school in the gym accompanied by Bill Halley and the Comets.

## Slide 8 - Dealing with Difficult People

We all encounter difficult people; people who are just plain tough to get along with. Perhaps these people you work with, perhaps they are family members, or perhaps they are people who cross your path for a little while. In this section, you will learn to recognize different difficult personality types, various strategies that will help you manage and the importance of being assertive.

## Slide 9 Definitions of “Difficult”

“Hard to do, achieve, or comprehend. Not easy, hard to manage; hard to satisfy.”

- American Heritage Dictionary

“...troublesome, perplexing.”

- The concise Oxford Dictionary

“...hard to deal with;...hard to please.”

- Gage Canadian Dictionary

## Slide 10

There are at least eleven beliefs that are universally taught and repeated by western society.

Overlay: 1. I must be loved or approved of by virtually everyone  
What is wrong with this belief?

Overlay: 2. I must be perfectly competent, adequate and achieving to be considered worthwhile

What is the problem with this belief?

Overlay: 3. If things are not as I want them to be, it is a terrible catastrophe

What issues do you see with this belief?

## Slide 11

Overlay: 4. There is always a right or perfect solution to every problem, and it must be found or the results will be catastrophic  
Is this realistic?

Overlay: 5. Unhappiness is caused by outside circumstances and a person has no control over it

Epictetus the sage wrote, “ There is only one way to happiness and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will.”

Overlay: 6. Dangerous and fearsome things are cause for great concern and their possibility must be continually dwelt upon  
Several generations ago, during one of the most turbulent of the desert wars in the Middle East, a spy was captured and sentenced to death by a general of the Persian army. The general, a man of intelligence and compassion, had adopted a strange and unusual custom in such cases. He permitted the condemned person to make a choice. The prisoner could either face a firing squad or pass through the Black Door.

As the moment of the execution drew near, the general ordered the spy to be brought before him for a short, final interview, the primary purpose of which was to receive the answer of the doomed man to the query: "What shall it be-the firing squad or the Black Door?"

This was not an easy decision, and the prisoner hesitated, but soon made it known that he much preferred the firing squad to the unknown horrors that might await him behind the ominous and mysterious door. Not long thereafter, a volley of shots in the courtyard announced that the grim sentence had been fulfilled.

The general, staring at his boots, turned to his aide and said, "You see how it is with men; they will always prefer the known to the unknown. It is characteristic of people to be afraid of the undefined. Yet I gave him his choice."

"What lies beyond the Black Door?" asked the aide.

"Freedom," replied the general, "and I've known only a few brave enough to take it."

## Slide 12

Overlay: 7. It is easier to avoid certain difficulties and self-responsibilities than to face up to them

You can't fly a kite unless you go against the wind and have a weight to keep it from turning somersaults.

Overlay: 8. A person should be dependent on others and should have someone stronger on whom to rely

Who thinks that this is true?

Overlay: 9. Past experiences and events are the determinants of present behaviour; the influence of the past cannot be eradicated  
Everyone has an irrevocable past. What is done is done. It can never be changed or recalled. Lord Byron, the English poet, once wrote, "No hand can make the clock strike for me the hours that are past."

So what can we do about it?

## Slide 13

Overlay: 10. A person should be quite upset over other people's problems and disturbances

Overlay: 11. Some people are naturally bad, wicked or villainous and therefore should be blamed and punished

Who would like to comment on this?

## Slide 14

There are a number of important questions to ask ourselves in our discussions about difficult people:

1. What are some of the characteristics of the person or persons that I view as difficult?
2. Do other people perceive this person or persons as difficult as well as me?
3. What is my own definition of a “difficult” person?
4. Are the persons or person I perceive as difficult always “difficult”?

## Slide 15 Here are some more...

5. Are there times or occasions where the person or persons is or are not difficult?

And tied in with that is

6. Has this person or these persons always been difficult?
7. When this person or these persons is or are being difficult, are there some things that get triggered in me? If yes, what is being triggered?

## Slide 17 Ask yourself these questions:

11. What is the likelihood of the person or persons being less difficult in the next six months?

Number 12 is a very challenging question. Do not be afraid to ask it:

12. Is there anything about me that is difficult at this time, or has been difficult in the past in my interactions with this person or these persons?

And another personally probing question:

13. Does this person or these persons remind me of someone else? Or remind me of another time or period in my life?

## Slide 18 – The In Bounds - Out of Bounds Model

The “In Bounds - Out of Bounds Model” helps us to have respect for where the other person is coming from and respond appropriately.

The author James Michener wrote, “I was born to a woman I never knew and raised by another who took in orphans. I do not know my background, my lineage, my biological or cultural heritage. But when I meet someone new, I treat them with respect. For after all, they could be my people.”

Overlay: When people live healthy, well-balanced lives, they want to be appreciated by others, be mature, be responsible, be considerate, be supportive and behave appropriately. This is referred to as being ‘in bounds’ or ‘within certain boundaries’. However...

## Slide 19

When people have not learned to live healthy, balanced lives; do not recognize their own shortcomings and feel threatened or insecure, they will: criticize and condemn, command rather than request, back down when confronted or lash out and act immature.

## Slide 20 (Cartoon)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote, “Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is.

Treat a man as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be.”

Difficult people often have similar patterns to their behaviour. We will look at several types of difficult people categorised by their behaviour. Some people engage in several of these difficult behaviours depending on the time, the situation, the person, or their stage in life.

## Slide 21 – Types of Difficult People

The General (This person thinks that he or she is the boss)

- They believe they know what must be done
- They have a need to control, command, or boss around.
- They are often demanding, no matter what the cost
- This person uses stares, verbal threats, intimidation
- For them, opposition is not tolerated and must be eliminated
- And they view others as incapable or incompetent

Now before we look at ways of dealing with these behaviours, let's look at a few others.

## Slide 22

The Judge (We label this person 'the critic')

- They appear to be always critical and judgmental
- They appear to think, talk and breathe to criticize
- The view almost everyone in a negative light
- They are quick to pass judgment and sentence on everyone
- They may be cynical, pessimistic and a habitual complainer
- For them, no one and nothing measures up to their standard (whatever that is)

## Slide 23

The Meddler (We may be inclined to label this person as 'the nosy one')

- They are always involved in things where they don't belong
- They ask inappropriate, invasive and personal questions
- They do the same with their comments
- They know everything about everyone
- They want to micromanage, they must control everything
- They're very nosy, they must be acquainted with everything
- They like to gossip as they must share everything
- They "play" people on against another



## Slide 24

The Invalidator (This person is the squasher when it comes to new ideas or other people's achievements)

- They must put others down to feel good about themselves
- They have real difficulty recognizing or celebrating other people's successes
- They are not very happy with themselves
- They may present as big egos, but (in reality) their egos are very fragile
- They don't want other people to be happy with themselves
- They give little jabs, comments and put downs (often in the form of humour)

## Slide 25

The Rebel (We could label this person 'the non-conformist')

- They always challenge authority and refuse to "go along" by running away, leaving, building opposition, disagreeing, getting angry, undermining your support or just being plain stubborn
- They need to be different to other people
- They have trouble "going along" with things or others

## Slide 26

The Pleaser (This person appears to be the nice one)

- They give a lot, but take little
- This person takes care of everyone else, but not for him or herself
- This person gives, gives and gives some more. They are an over-giver
- Their life is often out of balance
- They have learned to usually back down from situations
- Most others do not give the same in return
- Resentment, sadness and hurt blinds them
- They give more to get more

## Slide 27

The Angry One (Let me nick-name this one 'the troll')

- Uses anger to get what he/she wants
  - They may display either overt open anger or simmer with covert or hidden anger
  - They may be even be angry and not know it
  - People around him or her walk on "eggshells"
  - This person uses anger as a cover for other emotions
  - They appear to be grumpy and irritable
- And they may lashes out or 'explode' at the slightest provocation

## Slide 28

The Whiner (Also known as 'the complainer')

- Has a "poor me" attitude
- Demonstrates learned helplessness
- May be negative and pessimistic
- They are constantly complaining
- They view the "Glass" as half empty, not half full
- They give up easily
- They complain or behave as though they are always a victim
- They have a scarcity mentality versus an abundance mentality
- For them, "everyone else is lucky"; "everyone else is blessed"; "everyone else gets all the winning breaks"
- When this person is convinced that things can't be done, he will cling to that conviction in the face of the most obvious contradiction.

The story is told of the time when Robert Fulton gave the first public demonstration of his steamboat. One of those "can't be done" fellows stood in the crowd along the shore repeating. "He can't start it."

Suddenly, there was a belch of steam and the boat began to move. Startled, the man stared for a moment and then began to chant, "He can't stop it."

## Slide 29

### The Habitual Liar

- This person lies to build him or herself up
- They are sneaky and manipulative
- They often believe only their own version of truth
- They “play” people one against another
- Their behaviour is more than exaggeration
- He or she lies to get out of consequences/responsibilities
- And they are often in their own world of denial

## Slide 30

### The “I’m always right” person

- Must always be right
- They think black and white – everything is either win or lose
- This person hates to back down
- They rarely say “I’m sorry”
- This person presents him or herself with big ego. They think much of themselves
- They can be very domineering
- They have difficulty listening to others
- They can and often do act very immature
- And they often have very rigid thinking

## Slide 31

It is important to remember that difficult behaviour has been learned. Somewhere along their life journey difficult people have ‘learned’ to behave in a particular way to help them manage and cope with their world.

Now, this is good news in two counts.

1. We can respect them independent of their learned behaviours, and
2. Learned behaviours can be unlearned so we mustn’t label them permanently nor write them off as beyond learning.

## Slide 32 (Cartoon)

We ought to have three primary goals in dealing with difficult people.

Our first goal in dealing with difficult people is to make what is subconscious, conscious.

Our second goal is to be informed about what is going on in them and, most of all, in us.

Our third goal is to make informed choices versus having automatic reactions.

## Slide 33 – Choices and Options

When dealing with difficult people, it is important to remember that we always have a choice. In fact, we have several choices. There may be times when we feel our choices are limited, but, in most situations, there will be a variety of options to choose from. Start with yourself. Operate from a position of inner strength. Know your triggers. Do your own inner work.

## Slide 34 – Choices and Options

1. Suffer in silence
2. Suffer and complain
3. Pull back, Distance yourself, leave for a while
4. Stay away permanently See **the note on the back page of the handout booklet:**

A question from a previous seminar:

### **When does it make sense to practice avoidance?**

If the issue or relationship is unimportant

If there is no chance of a positive outcome

If the risks of confrontation outweigh the benefits of resolution

If the other party has significantly greater power

If one or more parties needs time to “cool down”

If it is appropriate to let others resolve the conflict

5. Accept difficult people the way they are. Note: Accept does not mean condone, or agree with.
6. Protect and/or care for yourself when they are around. Put on your emotional sunscreen
7. If required, keep yourself physically safe and protected.
8. Exercise your influence. (Detailed on next Slide)

### Slide 35 – Exercise Your Influence

When you are trying to exercise some influence, look at what people already do when they communicate successfully with others.

#### Overlay 1: Look for common ground.

Meet people where they are at, and be intentional and deliberate about finding things in common. Show signals with your body, your voice, and your words. Try to emotionally connect. Look for emotional “bids.” Send emotional “bids” of connection. Intentionally blend with that person.

#### Overlay 2: Redirect.

Look for another similar focus. Connect with the difficult person’s emotion. Connect with the difficult person’s concept. (It does not mean that you have to agree.)

#### Overlay 3: Assert yourself by setting your boundaries, by drawing your line in the sand.

It was my first year in high school and I was sitting on a bench in the school playground eating my lunch when my attention was drawn to two boys having a verbal altercation immediately in front of me.

Verbal blows were exchanged thick and fast and I wondered how long this would last before sleeves were rolled up and fists were bared. After a while one of the boys bent down and picked up a stick.

My immediate thought was that this verbal barrage would quickly escalate into violence and I braced myself to intervene to protect one or the other or both. I was surprised, however, when the one with the stick used it to scratch a line in the gravel separating him from his opponent.

Throwing the stick aside, he then, with defiant folded arms, threatened the other by saying, "I DARE you to cross this line onto my side!" The other, with equal defiance made an exaggerated display of raising his foot and dramatically stepping over the line.

The boy with the folded arms immediately unfolded them and grabbed the other in a bear hug, declaring, "Now you're on my side!"

They then jovially walked away, arm in arm, laughingly forgetting their previous argument.

### Slide 36

Skills to assist you to positively influence the difficult person's behaviour

Firstly, you must weigh the pros and cons of saying nothing versus the pros and cons of your decision to try to positively influence the difficult person

1. Look for positive intent. Look for common ground.
2. Demonstrate positive intent. Send emotional bids. Find ways to connect. Look for similarities.
3. Know your own triggers. Protect your "psyche." Change your reactions. Be confident. Put on "sunscreen" protection.
4. Know their triggers. Attempt to understand how they become difficult. Attempt to understand what is "driving" that behaviour now.
5. Picture yourself as a fact finder/detective. Don't react emotionally. Stay calm, focused, reassured.
6. Prepare in advance what you will say. (practice, rôle play, visualize, talk with someone you trust.) Find the right time and the right place to talk. (ie. Neutral turf.)

7. Ask specific questions when dealing with generalizations. What? Where? Who? When? How? “Is this first hand information?” “Who said that specifically?” “Were those the exact words?” Give another view of the facts.
8. Make what is vague, more clear. Ask specific and clarifying questions. “Help me understand this better.” “What do you mean by foolish?” “What does strange mean to you?” “How do you know I think that?”
9. Redirect to the emotion that is being triggered, or to the concept or belief that is being presented.
10. Use “I” statements. “I see it from this perspective.” “I need to hear more.” “I’d like us to get along better.” or use “we” statements. “We want a good solution.” “We need a good relationship to make this work.”

(See the “I” statements handout on page 11 of the handout booklet)

### Slide 37

11. Pay very careful attention to the language and words that are used, theirs and yours.
12. What is their job, interests, strengths?
13. Reinforce the person when they are not being difficult. Connect with them.
14. Ask for their input, opinion, thoughts and suggestions. Show respect.
15. Reinforce the new, desired behaviours.
16. Show appreciation; verbal, written, small gift/token, etc.
17. Understand the person’s “life rules,” their beliefs.
18. Presuppose how they might do things the next time. Plant the seed. “In the future...” “Next time this is the way to approach me...” “This might be helpful...”
19. Take care of yourself. Be your own best friend. Surround yourself with positive, healthy people.
20. Set your limits both personal and professional. Think “Boundaries”.

## Slide 38 – How to be assertive when dealing with negative behaviour or with negative comments.

1. Assertive communication begins with assertive self-talk.  
Give yourself permission to stand up for yourself. “I can do this.” “It’s time”.
2. Weigh the pros and cons of standing up for yourself.  
Remember you always have choices even though you may feel limited at times.
3. Visualization:  
Picture yourself being strong, healthy, assertive  
Picture yourself handling any situation  
Picture yourself not giving your time, energy, or well-being away to anyone.  
Picture yourself being assertive and confident  
Picture the person who is speaking or acting “difficult” coming from a place of vulnerability/insecurity/jealously/pain/etc.  
Picture this person playing “out of bounds” to self-protect to get the advantage
4. Assess: what the other person needs from their negative comments/behaviour  
Assess what you need now/or in the future  
Assess what’s been triggered in them  
Assess what’s being triggered in you  
Ask yourself, “What do I hope to gain from my being assertive in this encounter?”
5. Timing – is this the best time for this assertive encounter?
6. Location – is this the best location?



7. Feedback:

Stick to the current issue

Provide feedback in small doses, don't overwhelm

Keep feedback simple

Describe behaviour factually and specifically

State your reaction

State what you would like changed

State benefits to all

8. Non-verbal communication: pay attention to your body, face, voice, tones, etc.

9. Use "I" statements and/or we statements. Avoid "you" statements. (We mentioned this earlier)

10. Acknowledge person's value or previous positive behaviour, then state your feedback on current negative behaviour or comments. Look for the good.

### Slide 39

11. Focus on win/win.

12. Listen well. Seek to understand.

13. Agree with part or portion of their comments

14. Practice rôle play scenario/situation with a trusted friend, relative, or co-worker.

15. Set your limits and boundaries

16. Step back physically and emotionally if necessary

17. Walk away for a short time, a long time or even permanently (Not recommended in a marriage situation)

18. Withhold attention. Do not respond verbally or non-verbally to negative behaviour and comments.

19. Responding to attacks or manipulations:

Don't over defend yourself

Don't over deny yourself

Don't counter-attack

Don't get into or play the game

20. After the incident:

Ask yourself: What could you have done differently?

Do you regret how things have turned out?

If you could change something from that day or incident, what would you change?

What do you need to change?

### **Slide 40 – Examples of Assertive Responses**

Be assertive by speaking firmly and to the point.

1. That's your opinion

2. That's your picture of reality

3. I refuse to participate in a name calling argument

4. I believe you've offended yourself with that comment

5. Your negativity is not helpful to me

6. Your anger makes this conversation difficult right now

7. Was that meant to be a nasty comment?

8. I'll give this some more thought...and get back to you

## Slide 41

9. I agree with part of what you said
10. That comment was not appreciated
11. I'm choosing not to listen to anymore whining in my life
12. I don't appreciate hearing gossip about people.
13. That is your version of the truth, not mine.
14. I repeat, I'm not changing my plans.
15. I accept your choice, I don't agree with it.
16. Although you say I'm like Uncle Egbert, we are, however, two separate people.
17. That's not helpful to the situation right now.

## Slide 42 – You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar

Simply it's easier to attract people if you are pleasant than if you are not.

You are more likely to achieve your outcome if you smooth the way than if you bulldoze your way through.

Refer to handout: Creating a Positive Pleasing Personality

## Slide 43 – Caring Communication

Think how you can respond in one of these eight possible ways:  
Acknowledging – valuing but not necessarily agreeing with their opinions

Appreciating them for who they are or what they do

Assuring them that you are listening

Passive Listening God gave us two ears but only one mouth

Pacing – neither rushing them or cutting them short nor allowing them to go on and on

Reflecting back what they are saying – this tells them you are listening and along with paraphrasing helps to clarify that you have heard and understood correctly

And try to end with a positive close

## Slide 44 – Watch out for...

Put Downs

Impatience

Sarcasm & complaining

Jargon

Explaining too much

Ignoring the other's comments

Avoiding responsibility

Blaming others

### **IF TIME: Insert activity: Two Truths and One Lie**

For this new twist on a classic activity, start by breaking large groups into small discussion teams of four or five participants. Tell the teams that, one by one, team members should tell the others on their team two truths and one lie about themselves. As each person is talking, the role of other team members is to listen. After the team has heard everyone's "facts," start with the first person and have team members guess what information was a lie and why they chose that item as the untruth. After everyone has had a chance to guess, ask teams to answer the discussion questions on the back page of the handout.

#### **Activity Discussion Questions**

1. What were your guesses based on?
2. Were any of your guesses based on pre-existing judgments?
3. Does this ever happen when you are interacting with someone else?
4. Why does this happen? What can we do about it?
5. In what ways does this affect our communication with difficult people?
6. How does this impact our ability to resolve conflict?

## Slide 45 – Your ‘Difficult Person’ Coping Plan

Bear in mind that there are basically two people types: Those who are task oriented and those who are people oriented. For each of the two types, their intentions and needs are different.

Task focussed people intend to get things done and done correctly

People focussed people intend to get along with others and to be appreciated.

Task focussed people seek for control and perfection or excellence

People focussed people seek for approval and attention

Acknowledging these differences helps us with the next phase: practical coping strategies.

## Slide 46 – Your ‘Difficult Person’ Coping Plan

1. Assess the “situation”. Three doctors were standing a short distance from a pregnant lady patient who was lying in bed at the General Hospital.

Doctor One said, "It is spelt w-h-o-o-o-m."

"Oooh, no no no," said Doctor Two, "It is spelt w-r-o-o-o-m-b."

The third Doctor said that they both had it wrong: "It is spelt W-h-o-m-b-e."

The lady in the bed sat up and said, "Excuse me doctors, but I think the word you are trying to spell is w-o-m-b."

The first doctor said, "Madam, what you talking about? You don't know how to spell it, why, you don't even have one!"

"I beg your pardon," she said, "And you call yourselves Doctors?"

"Yes, and 'w-o-m-b' is not how to spell the sound a 4-wheel drive makes when you chase a buffalo through a muddy stream!"

2. Stop wishing they were “different” There are many paths to the top of the mountain, but the view is always the same. In many respects we are already different from one another. For example, women nodding during a conversation usually means:

'I understand you'. Men nodding in a discussion usually means:  
'I agree with you'  
3. Get distance between you and the difficult behaviour.  
Continue to respect the person.

4. Formulate a plan for interrupting the interaction

5. Implement the strategy based on some of the things we have shared today

6. Monitor your coping process

7. Modify or abandon the plan, if necessary

### Slide 46 – 4 Elements for Effectively Dealing With Difficult People

1. Know Specifically What You Want
2. Make the Commitment
3. Pay Close Attention
4. Be Flexible

If time – Slide 48 is additional strategies (Else jump to Slide # 55)

### Slide 49 Bulldozer

1. Stand your ground
2. Breathe!
3. Interrupt
4. Backtrack slightly
5. Aim at a “Bottom Line”
6. Peace with Honour

## Slide 50 The Sniper

1. Stop, Look, & Backtrack
2. Ask the “Relevancy” question
3. Seek group opinion
4. Now we need “Tank” strategy?
5. If he/she will talk - Listen!
6. Suggest a “Civil Future”

## Slide 51 – Know-it-all (1): The Expert

1. Know your stuff. Remember: no man knows less than the man who thinks he knows it all.
2. Backtrack with respect. Diplomacy is the art of letting someone else get your way.
3. Question firmly
4. Present options politely
5. Use plural pronouns
6. Acknowledge his/her competence

## Slide 52 – Know-it-all (2): The Balloon

1. Backtrack
2. Ask for specifics. Someone has said, “If you must cry over spilled milk, then please try to condense it.”
3. State the facts as you know them
4. Provide a way out
5. Handle alone whenever possible

## Slide 53 – The Complainer:

1. Listen
  2. Prepare to interrupt - Don't Agree
  3. Acknowledge the complaint
  4. Get specifics
  5. Use limiting responses
  6. Move to problem solving
- Sit on the fence long enough and the parade will pass you by

### Slide 54 – Indecisive:

1. Help them voice concerns (take cues from “what’s not said / indirectness”
2. Provide face-to-face support when possible
3. Reduce alternatives
4. Keep the action step. You can’t direct the wind, but you can adjust your sails.
5. Watch behaviour - “don’t push too far”

### Slide 55 - Summary

Remember your choices and options. Make small, gradual steps in your change process. Practice. Think assertively. Remember it’s your time, energy, and well-being. Stay focused. Make the conscious decision to live well and to live positively.

### Slide 56 – Looking Ahead to Future Programs

### Slide 57 – Question Time

### Slide 58 – Thank You For Coming






Welcome

to Today's Seminar

[www.lhartley.com](http://www.lhartley.com)

**How to  
Deal With  
Difficult People**

A cartoon illustration of a bulldog wearing a top hat and a monocle, standing on its hind legs with its front paws raised. The bulldog has a grumpy expression.

**A seminar with Dr Lionel Hartley**



# Communication

## **President to VP:**

Next Thursday, Halley's Comet will appear over this area. This is an event that occurs only once every 75 years. Call the deans and have them assemble their professors and students on the athletic field and explain this phenomena to them. If it rains, cancel the observation and have the classes meet in the gym to see a film about the comet.



# Communication

## **VP to Deans:**

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# Communication

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# Communication

## **Student writing to parents:**

When it rains next Thursday over the school athletic field, the phenomenal 75 year-old President will cancel all classes and appear before the whole school in the gym accompanied by Bill Halley and the Comets.



# How to Deal With Difficult People

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Lionel Hartley, author, radio broadcaster, public speaker and retired sociologist. He was a Lifestyle Educator and Family-life Counsellor for three decades. He is a grandparent, married to Rosemary (for 40+ years) with three grown children.

[www.lrhartley.com/difficult](http://www.lrhartley.com/difficult)



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# Dealing with Difficult People

## Irrational beliefs

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# Dealing with Difficult People

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# Dealing with Difficult People

## Irrational beliefs

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11. Some people are naturally bad, wicked or villainous and therefore should be blamed and punished



## **Important questions to ask ourselves in our discussions about difficult people:**

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# The In Bounds - Out of Bounds Model

## In Bounds

When people live healthy, well-balanced lives, they want to

- Be appreciated
- Be mature
- Be responsible
- Be considerate
- Be supportive
- Be appropriate
- etc



# The In Bounds - Out of Bounds Model

## Out of Bounds

When people have not learned to live healthy, balanced lives; do not recognize their own shortcomings and feel threatened or insecure, they will:

- Criticize/condemn
- Command
- Back down
- Lash out
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# Types of Difficult People

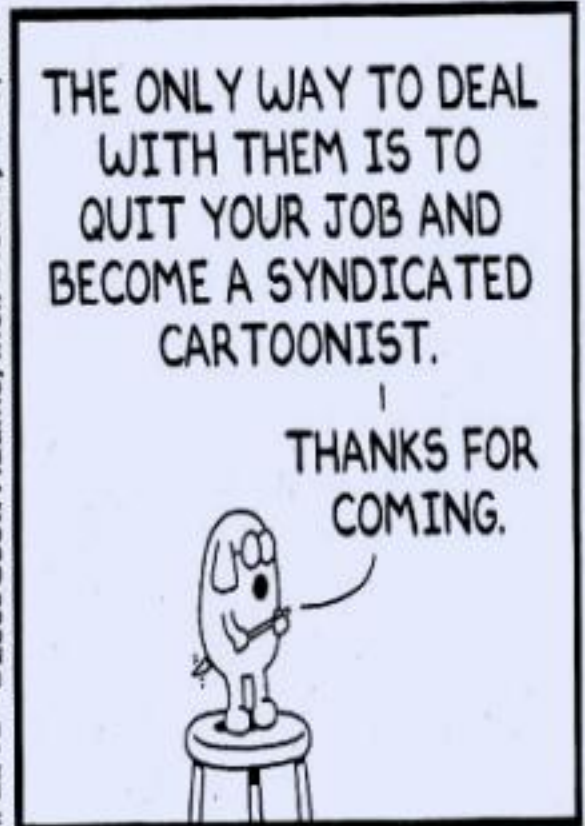
DILBERT



www.dilbert.com scottadams@aol.com



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# Types of Difficult People

## The General

- Believe they know what must be done
- Have a need to control, command, or boss around.
- Demanding, no matter what the cost
- Use stares, verbal threats, intimidation
- Opposition is not tolerated and must be eliminated
- View others as incapable or incompetent



# Types of Difficult People

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- Always critical and judgmental
- Think, talk and breathe to criticize
- Views almost everyone negatively
- Passes judgment and sentence to everyone
- Cynical, pessimistic, complainer
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# Types of Difficult People

## The Meddler

- Are always involved in things where they don't belong
- They ask inappropriate, invasive and personal questions
- They do the same with their comments
- They know everything about everyone
- They want to micromanage
- Very nosy
- Like to gossip
- They "play" people



# Types of Difficult People

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- Must put others down to feel good about themselves
- Have real difficulty recognizing or celebrating other people's successes
- Not very happy with themselves
- May present as big egos, but their egos are very fragile
- Don't want other people to be happy with themselves
- Give little jabs, comments, put downs (often in the form of humour)



# Types of Difficult People

## The Rebel

- ❑ Always challenges authority. Refuses to “go along” by running away, leaving, building opposition, disagreeing, getting angry, undermining your support, being stubborn
- ❑ Need to be different to other people
- ❑ Have trouble “going along” with things





# Types of Difficult People

## The Pleaser

- Gives a lot, but takes little
- Takes care of everyone else, but not for himself/herself
- Gives, gives and gives some more, over-giver
- Life is often out of balance
- Learned to usually back down from situations
- Most others do not give the same in return
- Resentment, sadness, hurt blinds
- Give more to get more



# Types of Difficult People

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- Uses anger to get what he/she wants
- Overt anger/convert anger
- May be angry and not know it
- People around him/her walk on “eggshells”
- Uses anger as a cover for other emotions
- Grumpy, irritable
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- “Poor me” attitude
- Learned helplessness
- Negative, pessimistic
- Constant complainer
- “Glass is half empty”
- Gives up easily
- Always a victim
- Scarcity mentality versus an abundance mentality
- “Everyone else is lucky”



# Types of Difficult People

## The Habitual Liar



- Lies to build oneself up
- Sneaky manipulative
- Often believes own version of truth
- “Plays” people
- Behaviour is more than exaggeration
- Lies to get out of consequences/responsibilities
- Often in own denial



# Types of Difficult People

## The “I’m always right” person

- Must always be right
- Think win/lose
- Hates to back down
- Rarely says “I’m sorry”
- Presents as big ego
- Can be very domineering
- Have difficulty listening
- Can act very immature
- Often have rigid thinking



# Types of Difficult People



Illustrations selected by Lionel from Eureka Software's Vector Clipart



**Important to Remember:** Difficult behaviour has been learned. Somewhere difficult people have learned to behave in a particular way to help them manage and cope with their world.



# Types of Difficult People



**Three  
Goals**



# Choices and Options



- Start with yourself
- Operate from a position of inner strength
- Know your triggers
- Do your own inner work.





## Choices and Options



1. Suffer in silence
2. Suffer and complain
3. Create distance
4. Stay away permanently
5. Accept difficult people the way they are.  
**Note: *Accept does not mean condone, or agree with.***
6. Protect and/or care for yourself
7. Keep yourself physically safe
8. Exercise your influence. (Detailed on next slide)



# Exercise Your Influence

When you are trying to exercise some influence, look at what people already do when they communicate successfully with others.

1. Look for common ground
2. Redirect
3. Assert yourself



# Skills to Assist You to Positively Influence the Difficult Person's Behaviour



1. Look for positive intent
2. Demonstrate positive intent
3. Know your own triggers
4. Know their triggers
5. Picture yourself as a fact finder/detective
6. Prepare in advance what you will say.
7. Ask specific questions
8. Make what is vague, more clear.
9. Redirect
10. Use "I" statements.



## Skills to Assist You to Positively Influence the Difficult Person's Behavior



11. Pay very careful attention to the language and words
12. What is their job, interests, strengths?
13. Reinforce the person when they are not being difficult
14. Ask for their input
15. Reinforce the new, desired behaviours.
16. Show appreciation
17. Understand the person's "life rules"
18. Presuppose how they might do things the next time
19. Take care of yourself.
20. Set your limits



## **How to be assertive when dealing with negative behaviour or with negative comments:**

1. Assertive communication begins with assertive self-talk.
2. Weigh the pros and cons of standing up for yourself.
3. Visualization
4. Assess: what the other person needs / what you need
5. Timing – is this the best time for this assertive encounter?
6. Location – is this the best location?
7. Feedback
8. Non-verbal communication
9. Use “I” statements and/or we statements. Avoid “you” statements
10. Acknowledge person’s value or previous positive behaviour



## **How to be assertive when dealing with negative behaviour or with negative comments (continued)**

11. Focus on win/win.
12. Listen well. Seek to understand.
13. Agree with part or portion of their comments
14. Practice rôle play scenario/situation
15. Set your limits and boundaries
16. Step back physically and emotionally if necessary
17. Walk away for a short time/long time/permanently
18. Withhold attention
19. Responding to attacks or manipulations: Don't over defend yourself / deny yourself / counter-attack or get into or play the game
20. After the incident:
  - What could you have done differently?
  - Do you regret how things have turned out?
  - If you could change something from that day or incident, what would you change?
  - What do you need to change?



## Examples of Assertive Responses



Be assertive by speaking firmly and to the point.

1. That's your opinion
2. That's your picture of reality
3. I refuse to participate in a name calling argument
4. I believe you've offended yourself with that comment
5. Your negativity is not helpful to me
6. Your anger makes this conversation difficult right now
7. Was that meant to be a nasty comment?
8. I'll give this some more thought...and get back to you



## Examples of Assertive Responses



9. I agree with part of what you said
10. That comment was not appreciated
11. I'm choosing not to listen to anymore whining in my life
12. I don't appreciate hearing gossip about people.
13. That is your version of the truth, not mine.
14. I repeat, I'm not changing my plans.
15. I accept your choice, I don't agree with it.
16. Although you say I'm like Uncle Egbert, we are, however, two separate people.
17. That's not helpful to the situation right now.





# You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar

Simply it's easier to attract people if you are pleasant than if you are not.

You are more likely to achieve your outcome if you smooth the way than if you bulldoze your way through.



## Creating a Positive Pleasing Personality.

As you will have already realized, to get the most out of life, you will need to be able to get along with people. This means that others will like you and want to do things for you.

**Your personality is your attitude in action.**

How do you get along with people? It is because they find your personality positive and pleasing.

How do you get along with people? Here are a few tips:

1. Be a friend, be friendly.

2. Be as a friend - how you would like to be treated.

3. Be others.

# *Caring Communication:*

- **Acknowledging**
- **Appreciating**
- **Assuring**
- **Passive Listening**
- **Pacing**
- **Reflecting**
- **Paraphrasing**
- **A positive close**



# *Watch Out For:*

- **Put Downs**
- **Impatience**
- **Sarcasm & complaining**
- **Jargon**
- **Explaining too much**
- **Ignoring the other's comments**
- **Avoiding responsibility**
- **Blaming others**



# Your 'Difficult Person' Coping Plan

## ———— *People Types* ————

### *TASK FOCUSED:*

#### INTENT:

- To get things done
- To get things right

#### NEED:

- Control
- Perfection



### *PEOPLE FOCUSED:*

#### INTENT:

- To get along
- To get appreciated

#### NEED:

- Approval
- Attention



# **Your ‘Difficult Person’ Coping Plan**

- 1. Assess the “situation”**
- 2. Stop wishing they were “different”**
- 3. Get distance between you and the difficult behaviour**
- 4. Formulate a plan for interrupting the interaction**
- 5. Implement strategy**
- 6. Monitor coping process**
- 7. Modify or abandon plan, if necessary**





## *4 Elements for Effectively Dealing With Difficult People*



- 1. Know Specifically *What* You Want**
- 2. Make the Commitment**
- 3. Pay Close Attention**
- 4. Be Flexible**



Frogs have it easy; they can eat what bugs them.

# Additional Strategies



*BULLDOZER*



*COMPLAINER*



*SNIPER*



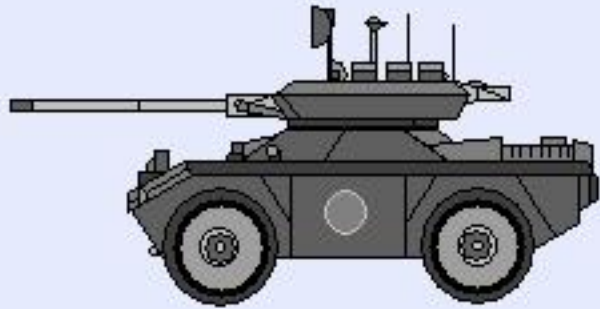
*EXPERT*



*INDECISIVE*



*BALLOON*



# Bulldozer

1. **Stand your ground**
2. *Breathe!*
3. **Interrupt**
4. **Backtrack slightly**
5. **Aim at a “Bottom Line”**
6. **Peace with Honour**







# *The Sniper*

- 1. Stop, Look, & Backtrack**
- 2. Ask the “Relevancy” question**
- 3. Seek group opinion**
- 4. Now we need “Tank” strategy?**
- 5. If he/she will talk - *Listen!***
- 6. Suggest a “Civil Future”**





# Know-it-all (1): (The *Expert*)

1. *Know your stuff*
2. **Backtrack with respect**
3. **Question *firmly***
4. **Present options *politely***
5. **Use plural pronouns**
6. **Acknowledge his/her competence**





# **Know-it-all (2):** ***(The Balloon)***

- 1. Backtrack**
- 2. Ask for specifics**
- 3. State facts as you know them**
- 4. Provide a way out**
- 5. Handle alone whenever possible**





# The Complainer:

1. Listen
2. Prepare to interrupt - *Don't Agree*
3. Acknowledge the complaint
4. Get specifics
5. Use limiting responses
6. Move to problem solving





# Indecisive:

- 1. Help them voice concerns**
- 2. Provide face-to-face support**
- 3. Reduce alternatives**
- 4. Keep the action step**
- 5. Watch your behaviour**



# Summary

Remember your choices and options. Make small, gradual steps in your change process. Practice. Think assertively. Remember it's your time, energy, and well-being. Stay focused. Make the conscious decision to live well and to live positively.



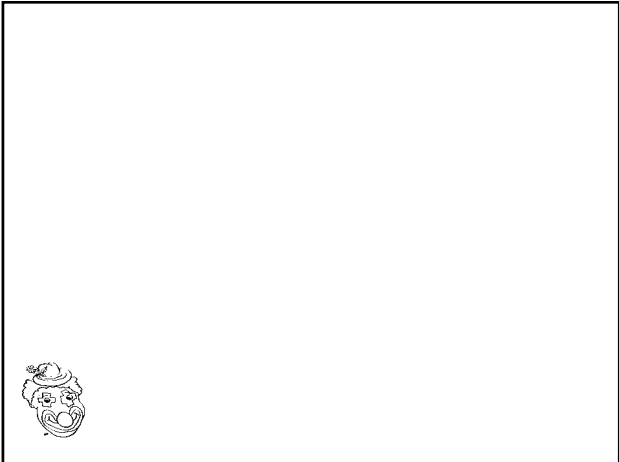
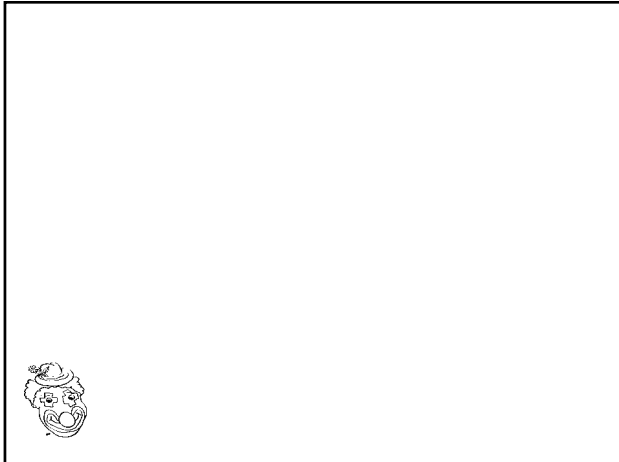


**Looking ahead  
to future programs....**

# Question Time








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**The In Bounds - Out of Bounds Model**

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When people live healthy, well-balanced lives, they want to

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### Three Goals

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When you are trying to exercise some influence, look at what people already do when they communicate successfully with others.

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2. Redirect
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### Notes

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# “I” Messages for Expressing Feelings.

## Accepting responsibility for your feelings.

**Step One:** Understand when to use and how to use “I” statements in place of “you” statements and other harmful statements.

In order to communicate our feelings clearly, we must, of course, be aware of them, comfortable or at least accepting of them, and able to accurately express the feelings in words. When we lack this awareness, acceptance, or verbal skill, our feelings are likely to be expressed indirectly and ineffectively, as in the “you” statements we have discussed (or will discuss) today.

**Step Two:** Look for opportunities to use “I” statements.

Think about the examples of “you” and “we” statements that Lionel has shared and see if any remind you of possible situations in your life. If so, when you get home, make some notes on how you could handle such situations differently in the future and perhaps plan to arrange an opportunity to try out “I” statements.

Pay special attention to stressful relationships or when you want to communicate in sensitive areas, such as money, gender rôles, anger, submissiveness, sex, etc.

Think over the “I” statement purposes that Dr Lionel has discussed. Do any apply to you? If so, give some thought to how you can handle the situations better.

**Step Three:** Practice giving “I” messages in your daily conversations.

Most of us (me too!) find it hard to change our speech patterns. We feel awkward. “I” statements seem counter to what we have been taught in English classes, and that is, “Don’t say I, I, I.” We are self-conscious about focusing on ourselves. It takes practice to get comfortable with “I” statements.

Keep watching for opportunities in casual conversations to express a feeling or an opinion tactfully. Act quickly, as soon as you are aware of a feeling say, “I am feeling...”

Most people are interested in genuine feelings, especially if the feelings involve them. It is nourishment for growing friendships.

Tell yourself that one of the best ways to resolve a conflict is for all relevant factors to be considered in arriving at a “no-lose” solution. Your feelings, needs, and preferences are important factors! So are the other person’s. Feelings have to be shared, diplomatically.

### **Give yourself time**

The *idea* of an “I” statement is easy – monitoring your thinking and speech to catch blaming, judging, controlling “you” statements is *not* easy. This takes time. If you have a problem in this area and carefully concentrate on it for a week or so, you may well suddenly find that you are expressing yourself differently.

Thank you for your participation in our seminar today.

**Skills to Assist You to Positively Influence the Difficult Person's Behavior**

11. Pay very careful attention to the language and words
12. What is their job, interests, strengths?
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6. Location – is this the best location?
7. Feedback
8. Non-verbal communication
9. Use "I" statements and/or we statements. Avoid "you" statements
10. Acknowledge person's value or previous positive behaviour



Notes

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**How to be assertive when dealing with negative behaviour or with negative comments (continued)**

11. Focus on win/win.
12. Listen well. Seek to understand.
13. Agree with part or portion of their comments
14. Practice rôle play scenario/situation
15. Set your limits and boundaries
16. Step back physically and emotionally if necessary
17. Walk away for a short time/long time/permanently
18. Withhold attention
19. Responding to attacks or manipulations: Don't over defend yourself / deny yourself / counter-attack or get into or play the game
20. After the incident:
  - What could you have done differently?
  - Do you regret how things have turned out?
  - If you could change something from that day or incident, what would you change?
  - What do you need to change?



Notes

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### Examples of Assertive Responses

Be assertive by speaking firmly and to the point.

1. That's your opinion
2. That's your picture of reality
3. I refuse to participate in a name calling argument
4. I believe you've offended yourself with that comment
5. Your negativity is not helpful to me
6. Your anger makes this conversation difficult right now
7. Was that meant to be a nasty comment?
8. I'll give this some more thought...and get back to you



### Notes

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### Examples of Assertive Responses

9. I agree with part of what you said
10. That comment was not appreciated
11. I'm choosing not to listen to anymore whining in my life
12. I don't appreciate hearing gossip about people.
13. That is your version of the truth, not mine.
14. I repeat, I'm not changing my plans.
15. I accept your choice, I don't agree with it.
16. Although you say I'm like Uncle Egbert, we are, however, two separate people.
17. That's not helpful to the situation right now.



### Notes

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### You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar

Simply it's easier to attract people if you are pleasant than if you are not.  
You are more likely to achieve your outcome if you smooth the way than if you bulldoze your way through.



### Notes

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# Creating a Positive Pleasing Personality.

As you will have already realised, to get the most out of life, you will need to be able to get along with people. This means that others will like you and want to do things for you.

## **Your personality is your attitude in action.**

When you get along with people it is because they find your personality positive and pleasing. How can we create a positive personality? Here are a few tips:

1. To make and keep a friend, Be a friend; be friendly.
2. Think what type of person you would like to have as a friend - how you would like to be treated, then be that type of person yourself for others.
3. People need to feel wanted, loved, needed, so help create these feelings in others.
4. Be kind to others - You may not feel you can love them, but at least you can be kind.
5. Learn to love yourself because others will often treat to you the way they see you treating yourself.
6. Let others impress you rather than trying to impress them.
7. Honesty often hurts, often makes us vulnerable, but honesty always wins in the end.
8. Deliberately do and/or say things to make others feel important: Praise, encouragement, support, co-operation, courtesy (please & thank-you).
9. Be enthusiastic - it is contagious, it motivates others as well as you, it builds bonds within relationships.
10. Call others by name, repeat it often in conversation.
11. Learn to listen. People are warmed more by how you listen than what you say.
12. Be positive, as positive attitudes are attractive to others. We like to be around positive people - negative people repel us (if we are negative, we repel others).
13. Be cheerful & pleasant. Smile often - smile with your eyes as well as your mouth.
14. Before you choose to argue, stop and place a value on your friendship.
15. Help others to like themselves. Remind them that you like yourself better when you are with them.
16. Show a genuine interest in others, listen as you invite them to talk about themselves. Seek their opinions, ideas, viewpoints.
17. If you can't say something good about a person, keep silent.
18. Allow the other person to be "right" sometimes.
19. If you really must poke fun at someone, be sure it is you.

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**Client Reference:**

## ***Caring Communication:***

- Acknowledging
- Appreciating
- Assuring
- Passive Listening
- Pacing
- Reflecting
- Paraphrasing
- A positive close



## Notes

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## ***Watch Out For:***

- Put Downs
- Impatience
- Sarcasm & complaining
- Jargon
- Explaining too much
- Ignoring the other's comments
- Avoiding responsibility
- Blaming others



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## Notes

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## **Your 'Difficult Person' Coping Plan**

### ***People Types***

#### ***TASK FOCUSED:***

##### **INTENT:**

- To get things done
- To get things right

##### **NEED:**

- Control
- Perfection

#### ***PEOPLE FOCUSED:***

##### **INTENT:**

- To get along
- To get appreciated

##### **NEED:**

- Approval
- Attention



## Notes

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## Your 'Difficult Person' Coping Plan

1. Assess the "situation"
2. Stop wishing they were "different"
3. Get distance between you and the difficult behaviour
4. Formulate a plan for interrupting the interaction
5. Implement strategy
6. Monitor coping process
7. Modify or abandon plan, if necessary



## Notes

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## 4 Elements for Effectively Dealing With Difficult People

1. Know Specifically *What You Want*
2. Make the Commitment
3. Pay Close Attention
4. Be Flexible

Frogs have it easy; they can eat what bugs them.



## Notes

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## Additional Strategies



**BULLDOZER**



**COMPLAINER**



**SNIPER**



**EXPERT**



**INDECISIVE**



**BALLOON**



## Bulldozer

1. Stand your ground
2. *Breathe!*
3. Interrupt
4. Backtrack slightly
5. Aim at a "Bottom Line"
6. Peace with Honour





## *The Sniper*

1. Stop, Look, & Backtrack
2. Ask the “Relevancy” question
3. Seek group opinion
4. Now we need “Tank” strategy?
5. If he/she will talk - *Listen!*
6. Suggest a “Civil Future”



## **Know-it-all (1): (The *Expert*)**

1. *Know* your stuff
2. Backtrack with respect
3. Question *firmly*
4. Present options *politely*
5. Use plural pronouns
6. Acknowledge his/her competence



## **Know-it-all (2): (The *Balloon*)**

1. Backtrack
2. Ask for specifics
3. State facts as you know them
4. Provide a way out
5. Handle alone whenever possible



## **The Complainer:**

1. Listen
2. Prepare to interrupt - *Don't Agree*
3. Acknowledge the complaint
4. Get specifics
5. Use limiting responses
6. Move to problem solving



## **Indecisive:**

1. Help them voice concerns
2. Provide face-to-face support
3. Reduce alternatives
4. Keep the action step
5. Watch your behaviour



## Notes

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## Summary

Remember your choices and options. Make small, gradual steps in your change process. Practice. Think assertively. Remember it's your time, energy, and well-being. Stay focused. Make the conscious decision to live well and to live positively.



## Notes

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## Ten Tips for Dealing with Difficult People

1. When dealing with difficult people, it's more effective to be assertive rather than angry. Anger can be contagious, so try to avoid "catching" the other person's hostility.
2. Learn to recognize low levels of anger in others. This can allow you to intervene earlier and create resolutions more easily. Listen to language and watch non-verbal cues as well. Is someone's tone changing or their volume increasing?
3. Use a technique called "fogging". Say something general or broad such as "That's interesting", when inwardly you disagree.
4. Work at accepting difficult people while still not liking their difficult behavior. This allows you to get some distance from the behavior itself, and gain a more expansive perspective.
5. Consciously being *nice* to difficult people can sometimes be a great way of dealing with them. But do guard against passive-aggressiveness on your own part. In other words, don't be loving and/or collaborative if it feels dishonest to do so.
6. Try to get a better sense of what sets the other person off. Notice what his or her buttons are, and avoid hitting them, if possible.
7. Compromise! Give in on some things and learn to see compromise as a strength rather than a concession.
8. Listen actively. Ask for clarification of what the other person has said instead of arguing with them. Focus on their needs and your own, not just the "issue".
9. Ask yourself what you may be doing to contribute to the problem; if you're stuck, talk it over with a counselor or trusted friend.
10. Keep your distance from those who seem unsafe. See your fear as a cue, warning sign, or "gift". Set limits with inappropriate behavior; make it clear you will not tolerate this and will seek help if the situation doesn't change. If you feel you're in danger, notify appropriate personnel/authorities and take whatever reasonable steps necessary to protect yourself.