

Conflict - Dealing with Difficult People

Conflict Management Skills

Communication Skills - Dealing with Difficult People

When dealing with difficult people, stay out of it emotionally and concentrate on listening non-defensively and actively.

People may make disparaging and emotional remarks - don't rise to the bait!

1. Don't get Hooked !!!

When people behave towards you in a manner that makes you feel angry, frustrated or annoyed - this is known as a Hook.

We can even become "Hooked" by the way people look, how they talk, how they smell and even by their general demeanour.

If we take the bait then we are allowing the other person to control our behaviour.

This can then result in an unproductive response.

We have a choice whether we decided to get hooked or stay unhooked.

2. Don't let them get to you

We often allow the other person's attitude to irritate or annoy us.

This becomes obvious to the other person through our tone of voice and our body language.

This only fuels a difficult situation. When dealing with difficult people, stay out of it emotionally and concentrate on listening non-defensively and actively.

People may make disparaging and emotional remarks - don't rise to the bait!

3. Listen - listen - listen

Look and sound like you're listening. - When face-to-face you need to look interested, nod your head and keep good eye contact.

Over the 'phone - you need to make the occasional "Uh Hu - I See"

If the other person senses that you care and that you're interested in their problem, then they're likely to become more reasonable.

4. Get all the facts - write them down

Repeat back (paraphrase) the problem to ensure your understanding and to let the other person know that you are listening.

5. Use names

A person's name is one of the warmest sounds they hear. It says that you have recognised them as an individual. It is important not to overdo it as it may come across as patronising to the other person.

Make sure they know your name and that you'll take ownership of the problem.

6. DON'T blame someone or something else

7. Watch out for people's egos

" Don't interrupt

" Don't argue

" Don't jump in with solutions

" Allow them to let off steam

" Don't say, "Calm down".

8. See it from the other person's point of view

Too often we think the "difficult" person is making too much fuss.

We think - "What's the big deal; I'll fix it right away". It is a big deal for the other person and they want you to appreciate it.

You don't necessarily need to agree with the person however you accept the fact that it's a problem for them.



9. Be very aware of your body language and tone of voice

We often exacerbate a situation without realising it.

Our tone of voice and our body language can often contradict what we're saying.

We may be saying sorry however our tone and our body language may be communicating our frustration and annoyance.

People listen with their eyes and will set greater credence on how you say something rather than what you say.

It's also important to use a warm tone of voice when dealing with a difficult situation.

This doesn't mean being "nicey-nicey" or behaving in a non-assertive manner.

10. Words to avoid

There are certain trigger words that can cause people to become more difficult especially in emotionally charged situations. These include:

"You have to" -

"But" -

"I want you to" -

"I need you to" -

"It's company policy" -

"I can't or You can't" -

"Jargon" or "Buzz" words -

"Sorry" -

"I'll try" -

11. Stop saying Sorry

Sorry is an overused word, everyone says it when something goes wrong and it has lost its value.

How often have you heard - "Sorry 'bout that, give me the details and I'll sort this out for you." Far better to say - "I apologise for ."

And if you really need to use the "sorry" word, make sure to include it as part of a full sentence. "I'm sorry you haven't received that information as promised Mr Smith." (Again, it's good practice to use the person's name).

There are other things you can say instead of sorry.

12. Empathise

The important thing to realise when dealing with a difficult person is to:

Deal with their feelings - then deal with their problem.

Using empathy is an effective way to deal with a person's feelings.

Empathy isn't about agreement, only acceptance of what the person is saying and feeling.

Basically, the message is - "I understand how you feel."

Obviously, this has to be a genuine response, the person will realise if you're insincere and they'll feel patronised.

Examples of an empathy response would be - "I can understand that you're angry," or "I see what you mean." Again, these responses need to be genuine.

13. Build Rapport

Sometimes it's useful to add another phrase to the empathy response, including yourself in the picture. - "I can understand how you feel, I don't like it either when that happens to me"

This has the effect of getting on the other person's side and builds rapport.

Some people get concerned when using this response, as they believe it'll lead to "Well why don't you do something about it then."

The majority of people won't respond this way if they realise that you are a reasonable and caring person.

If they do, then continue empathising and tell the person what you'll do about the situation.

14. Under promise - over deliver

Whatever you say to resolve a situation, don't make a rod for your own back.

We are often tempted in a difficult situation to make promises that are difficult to keep.

We say things like - "I'll get this sorted this afternoon and phone you back." It may be difficult to get it sorted "this afternoon". Far better to say - "I'll get this sorted by tomorrow lunchtime." Then phone them back that afternoon or early the next morning and they'll think you're great.
You don't win them all.

Remember, everyone gets a little mad from time to time, and you won't always be able to placate everyone, - there's no magic formula.

However, the majority of people in this world are reasonable people and if you treat them as such, then they're more likely to respond in a positive manner.

Some more thoughts:

These notes are primarily designed to help deal with difficult people when we have made a mistake.

We often have to deal with other people where we have not made a mistake, however, the people we're dealing with often prove to be difficult and unwilling to accept what we say.

We, therefore, need to demonstrate assertive behaviour that helps us communicate clearly and confidently our needs, wants and feelings to other people without abusing in any way their human rights