

## 10 Tips for Dealing with Difficult People

Keeping cool, calm and collected when dealing with difficult people is easier said than done. Next time you're dealing with a difficult person - your boss, a co-worker, family member (kids or mother-in-law issues anyone?), your spouse or even a stranger - here are 10 tips worth remembering, from author Kris Cole's ***Crystal Clear Communication***:

1. **Figure out what they're after:** People are difficult because they believe it gets them what they want. Some examples of what the difficult person might be after include respect, attention, to let off some steam, feel important, be understood or have a problem or complaint fixed. Sometimes, once they've achieved what they're after, the difficult behaviour stops. Sometimes, it escalates. Generally speaking, if the person is genuinely trying to communicate, give them what they want, for example, a customer with a genuine complaint, or a person who's angry for good reason. On the other hand, the difficult person might be a whinger, back-stabber, gossip, sarcastic person or a bully. In this case, we're probably better advised to remove the pay-off they want and provide a pay-off they don't like. In the case of a bully, for example, tell them 'John, stop shouting. Speak to me in a normal tone of voice.' If we do this often enough, the difficult behaviour will begin to diminish.
2. **Separate the emotions from the issues:** As soon as you're faced with an angry or difficult person, erect an imaginary filter between you so you can strain out what you don't want - any hurtful emotion and personal attacks - and let in what you do want - facts and other useful information. Difficult and angry people often present their feelings as facts and confuse facts, fantasy and folklore. If someone says you've angered or offended them, 1. Ask 'What specifically did I say or do that has upset you?' 2. Listen carefully and let them 'get it all out.' 3. Tell them you appreciate their telling you. 4. Ask 'What can I do to make it right, right now?'
3. **Take a deep breath if you need to:** Stress drains the brain of oxygen. This causes us to lose our mental balance, our concentration and control of our emotions. Our brain cells have a higher rate of metabolism than other parts of the body and need relatively more oxygen. This is why it's important to take a deep breath during times of stress.
4. **Make sure your self-talk supports you:** Don't put yourself down or let yourself be put down. Use positive self-talk to help you keep calm. 'I'll work through this.' 'I'll handle this calmly and well.'
5. **Let difficult people know you've heard them and understood their point:** People often become difficult if they feel their message isn't getting through. To capture our attention, they might resort to strong language, shouting, exaggerating or getting 'in our face'. If we attend to them, really listen and show we're listening with our body language and our responses, people are less likely to become difficult in the first place. If they've already become difficult, they'll usually lower their voice and become more rational. We've noticed them and heard their point, so there's no longer a need to create a fuss.

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6. **Focus on a good outcome and be flexible in how you respond:** Don't let your ego get in the way of dealing effectively with difficult people. Work towards a satisfactory outcome, not to get 'one up' on the difficult person.
7. **Although we can't change someone's personality, we can change an aspect of their behaviour:** Work with the behaviour, not the person. See the difficult person's behaviour as a problem to be resolved, not a personality to be fixed.
8. **Realise that what you say and how you say it can make all the difference:** Always be courteous. This can be difficult if we disagree with what the person is saying or if they are saying it in a harsh or hurtful way. Bite your tongue if you have to!
9. **Don't take it personally. Realise the difficult person is communicating in the best way they know how:** Most of us have a range of communication methods and behaviours. We use them because they work. If they don't, we might be flexible and try an alternative approach. The habitually difficult person's range of communication methods and behaviours is more limited than most people's. They're probably just doing what they've always done and don't know any other ways to get what they want.
10. **Don't let the difficult person get to you or give them the power to make you feel bad, upset or angry:** Don't lose sleep over chronically difficult people. Some people are just plain difficult and there's nothing we can do about it. When faced with a persistently difficult person it helps to remember: some people bring joy wherever they go, others bring joy whenever they go.

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