Employee Professional Development Program

Take the High Road

8 Tips for Dealing with Difficult People

Sometimes people can be overwhelmingly difficult. If you have had to deal with someone who puts up tons of resistance, you know that things can quickly escalate out of control. Following are some effective tips to help turn around any situation with a difficult person:

- **Validate.** You might be surprised what this simple action will do. One common reason people put up resistance is because they do not feel heard or understood.

- **Think like them.** Imagine you are in their shoes for one moment. If you were in their situation, what would it feel like? Good problem solvers can change perspective.

- **Don't resist.** What you resist, persists. People tend to resist you more when you resist them.

- **When listening, slightly tilt your head.** We've learned that we communicate not only through words but with our body language. When you tilt your head slightly, people feel heard.

- **Know your outcome.** Before communicating, stop and think about how you want to feel as a result. Also, keep in mind how you want them to feel. Finally, be flexible.

- **Be open to the bigger lesson.** Sometimes there is a much bigger life lesson to be learned aside from the situation where someone is being difficult. It could be showing you how you relate to people in general, how you're creating conflict, or what the conflict triggers in you.

- **Downplay the situation.** Don't feed negativity. Big responses and long email replies can escalate a difficult situation. Don't call out the person's behavior with a grand reply but instead calmly listen with care. The person won't feel defensive but will feel understood.

- **Interrupt the pattern.** People often behave like robots. We get triggered and are often reacting to a story we loop in our heads. When dealing with someone difficult, interrupt the pattern by asking a question completely off-topic. This will offset their mental story, and you can approach the situation more proactively rather than defensively.

“**I am thankful for the difficult people in my life. They have shown me exactly who I don’t want to be.**” - Anonymous

**Tech Tip—Save a Tree!**

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