

How to deal with Difficult People

Nobody is 'difficult' except in the context of the relationship where their difficult behaviour occurs which can arise in many different settings. Remember we too are involved in the interaction. For this reason it is better to understand the PRINCIPLES of handling the behaviour than it is to learn PRESCRIPTIONS for specific types of behaviour.

The three 'C's

- ▶ What is the **Context**?
- ▶ What is the **Cost**?
- ▶ Have you got the **Commitment**?

Guiding Principles

- ▶ Maintain dignity and self-respect for all concerned
- ▶ First, seek to understand
- ▶ Remember, other people can't be changed
- ▶ Be honest about your point of view

The six KEY skills

- ▶ Preparation
- ▶ Setting boundaries and goals
- ▶ Staying cool
- ▶ Speaking clearly
- ▶ Listening to understand
- ▶ Knowing where to end.

Active listening

- ▶ Give them your full attention and keep a clear mind
- ▶ Ask the other person to explain exactly what they mean
- ▶ Summarise your understanding of the speaker's comments
- ▶ Ask pertinent questions to further clarify the situation.

The ASSUME technique	The SALVAGE Strategy
allows you to assume a position of control	for dealing with angry people
A is for ASSESS the situation	S Smile openly
S is for STOP wishing they were different	A Anticipate their hostility
S is for STEP BACK	L Listen non-defensively
U is for UNDERSTAND your strategy	V Verify their precise grievance
M is for MASTER the situation	A Agree with the true parts
E is for EXPECT to have to do it again	G Guarantee that something will be done
	E Encourage them to change direction

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Stress and difficult behaviour

When under stress, the fight-or-flight response also restricts our ability to think and problem solve. Psychologically people adopt 'conditioned stances' to ward off threat.

The Satir Categories

Virginia Satir, the American psychologist, identified 'default' patterns of behaviour that people adopt as defence mechanisms when they feel under attack.

People **BLAME**, so they appear strong, but are generally very critical

They **PLACATE**, so that others don't get angry and they often seek approval

They **COMPUTE**, in order to neutralise the threat and are cool, calm, collected

Or they **DISTRACT** to draw attention away from the threat

These four stances underlie most human negotiations when there is any sort of tension or pressure. Understanding and recognising them is a key factor.