

Dwight-Level Difficult: Dealing with Characters at Work

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Who are you?

1. Name and Role
2. Why did you pick this session?

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Outcomes

- ❑ Identify difficult behavior patterns before they go full soap opera.
- ❑ Use **Habit 5** to listen without losing your mind.
- ❑ Practice “I” messages that don’t sound like veiled threats.
- ❑ Know when to call HR (or hide in the supply closet).

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Think of a difficult person you've encountered in the past...

What made them difficult?



What strategies have you tried?



Let's meet some people



Difficult
people come
in many
varieties



The Tank

- Aggressive
- In your face
- Verbal and physical behavior
- Goal is control at all costs
- I win/YOU lose
- Big me/little you



Dealing with the Tank

- Maintain eye contact
- Stand your ground
- Don't fight with them it will escalate things
- Smile and maintain self control



Difficult people
come in many
varieties



The Know It All

- Dominate Conversations
- Argumentative
- Eliminates opposition by finding flaws and weaknesses
- Knowledgeable and competent
- Discredits others



Dealing with the Know It All

- Pick Your Battles
- Ignore them or thank them for the information
- Don't ask for their opinion
- Recognize their knowledge is valuable



Difficult People Come in Many Varieties



The THINK they Know It All

- Do NOT know what they are talking about
- Have a knack for conversation
- Acts like a professional



The THINK they Know It All

How to Deal....

- State the correct facts
- Give alternate opinions
- Move on to the next topic to deflate the balloon with little embarrassment



Difficult People Come in Many Varieties



The Emotional Vampire

- Always talk about themselves and their problems
- Negative/Complainers
- Manipulate and Control those around them
- Make you feel guilty for not doing what they want
- Never apologize for their behavior or take responsibility



The Emotional Vampire

How to Deal...

- Set limits on the amount of time you spend engaging.
- Don't engage in the drama
- If you have to meet with them, do it in a neutral space, connect virtually, or schedule something directly after so they don't take up much of your time.
- When all else fails, EJECT!



When to Escalate things to HR

You should escalate conflicts with coworkers to HR when they involve:

- Harassment
- Bullying
- Inappropriate sexual conduct or advances
- Threats against you, your family, or your livelihood
- Other coworkers
- Violations of discrimination, disability, equal employment, or equal pay laws

STAND UP!



“Tank”

“Know It All”

“Think they know it all”

“Emotional Vampire”

HAND UP!



PAIR UP!



What connections are you making? Aha's and take-aways?



HABIT 5

Seek First to
Understand,
Then to Be
Understood®

*The Habit of Empathic
Communication*



Common **Paradigm**

I need to make
sure people
understand my
point of view.

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Common Paradigm

I need to make
sure people
understand my
point of view.



Highly Effective Paradigm

I have greater
influence with
others if I truly
understand
them first.

Habit # 5- Seek to Understand then Be Understood

Think of a person with whom you find it challenging to communicate.

Example: "My son Will. When we talk, he probably sees me as trying to get him to do something (clean his room, sign up for a dual-credit college class, etc.), and actually, that's probably what I am trying to do!"

Write the name of the person you find challenging to communicate with and one idea regarding that person's perspective on your interactions.

How do you think this person views communicating with you?

Habit # 5- Seek to Understand then Be Understood

Although Empathic Listening can feel awkward at first and takes practice, it is rooted purely in your intent to understand the other person. Much of the time, using one or two empathic responses allows the person to feel heard.

It's a waste of time to do these reports; nobody even reads them!
(Emotion: Annoyed)

❖ **EMPATHIC RESPONSES (Reflect feelings and words.)**

- FEELINGS- You sound annoyed.
- WORDS- You're creating reports nobody reads.
- FEELINGS AND WORDS- You feel annoyed that you are spending time on reports nobody reads.

Habit # 5- Let's Practice Empathic Listening

Sarah hijacks and ruins every team meeting in the office...

- ❖ **EMPATHIC RESPONSES (Reflect feelings and words.)**
 - FEELINGS- You seem frustrated.
 - WORDS- You're saying that Sarah ruins every team meeting.
 - FEELINGS AND WORDS- You feel frustrated by Sarah's behavior.

I just lost my job.
(Emotion: Worry)

- ❖ **EMPATHIC RESPONSES (Reflect feelings and words.)**
 - FEELINGS- You sound really worried.
 - WORDS- You lost your job.
 - FEELINGS AND WORDS- You sound really concerned about losing your job.

Use Clarifying Questions

Sometimes the person you are seeking to understand isn't talkative. Rather than moving to autobiographical responses, use **clarifying questions** to stay in the other person's story, and this will help them articulate what they are feeling.



Sample clarifying questions:

- Can you tell me more?
- When you say _____, what do you mean?
- Can you help me understand what you mean when you say _____?

"You" and "I" Messages



"You" messages focus on the other person, do not communicate respect, and tend to attack another person's character or motives. For example, "*You* never consider my ideas!"

By contrast, "I" messages such as "I would like to express my ideas; would you consider them?" are far less likely to offend or feel like an attack.

Your boss regularly has unclear and changing expectations and then is dissatisfied with your work. You've just worked through the weekend to create a presentation for them, only to find they had something else in mind.

Empathic Response

- "You are disappointed because you expected something else."

Use "I" Messages

- "Can we review my understanding of your expectations for this project?"
- "I feel confused. Can I share my understanding of the scope of this project?"

How would you react?

You are having an important conversation, but every time you begin to state your point of view, you are interrupted.

Empathic Response

- "I can tell you're excited about your idea."

Use "I" Messages

- "Before we go there, could I finish my thought?"
- "I really appreciate your enthusiasm. Would you be willing to listen to my idea?"

Every time you try to introduce new ideas about how to structure work flow, you encounter a lot of resistance. This has been going on for some time now, and you are reaching your limit!

Empathic Response

- "It seems like you like the way we do things right now."

Use "I" Messages

- "I feel there is resistance when I suggest other options. Would you be willing to hear me out before responding?"
- "Is it okay if I share an alternate option?"

Tips for Empathic Communication



- **Begin With the End in Mind®.**
Define the outcome you desire from this interaction.
- **Consider the Emotional Bank Account.**
Think about the level of trust in the relationship.
- **Clearly state your intent.**
Be specific. Don't leave the interpretation of your motives to chance.

Phone



- It's easy to accidentally speak over someone on a phone call. Allow the other person to finish their thoughts before you respond.
- Manage silence carefully. You want to give space for others to think, but not have them think you have disconnected.
- Have sensitive conversations in private. Step into a separate room if among people.
- Don't use speakerphone in emotional conversations. It can feel disingenuous and can shut down communication.

Email and Text



- Read and write emails and texts carefully and completely.
- Have a trusted individual proofread your emails if appropriate for tone and clarity.
- If emotion is high, pause or step away from your device before crafting and sending your response.
- If you feel communication isn't working digitally, schedule a phone or face-to-face conversation.



What connections are you making?

Aha's and take-aways?

What are your next steps in the coming days? Weeks?

Questions and Answers

Thank you for your time!

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So how do you spot a Difficult person?

- ☐ They insist on having everything their own way
- ☐ They belittle you or insult you
- ☐ They leave you out of important conversations
- ☐ They always have an answer for everything
- ☐ They have difficulty with emotional regulation
- ☐ People seem to avoid them
- ☐ They exhibit toxic traits, like being picky, bossy, or gossiping
- ☐ They second-guess everything you say or do
- ☐ Their private and public behavior is inconsistent
- ☐ You don't feel comfortable around them
- ☐ They exhibit extreme jealousy, codependency, or other red flags in their relationships

Tips and Takeaways

Listen to them When faced with a challenging person or situation, start by just listening. Look at it as an exercise in curiosity. Try to understand — as much as possible — what they want and why they're giving you a hard time. If they're upset, avoid trying to placate them or shut them down. Telling someone to "calm down" usually has the opposite effect — especially if they think you're not too fond of them.

Get into their shoes From there, try to imagine things from their point of view. If you were this person, and you were behaving in this way, what would justify your behavior? What would have to be happening to convince you that you were right? That may give you insight into how the other person feels. Looking at things from their perspective doesn't necessarily mean that you have to agree with them. But it will help you develop compassion for them. Once you develop a bit of empathy for them, you open the way to communicating with compassion and respect.

Honor both of your needs

What works better — and feels a little more satisfying — is to come to an agreement that honors both of your needs. Find a way (if you have to spend time around each other) that you can do so with respect. Even if that person doesn't change their ways, they can become a little more pleasant to deal with. Mutual understanding (and some boundary-setting) can help accomplish that.

Use Humor- Sometimes, we get into difficult conversations because we take things too seriously. If you're in conflict with another person, using (appropriate) humor can help diffuse tension. Cracking a joke — or even a smile — can help lower the stakes. It can remind you of shared common ground and even shift you into a more collaborative mood.