



Act, and don't react, when you deal with a difficult person at the workplace. Next, understand and communicate well with them.

By **BARTON Goldsmith**

We all encounter difficult people every day. Sometimes, all we have to do to see one is to look in the mirror.

Is there a person in your life, or business, who is demanding and intimidating? What about the person who never follows through, or is never happy?

If someone is aggressive or intimidating in their manner, there are a couple of tactics that work well.

First, listen to what it is they have to say, but don't engage in an argument. Being polite, succinct and precise in your language will give them less room to engage in this negative behaviour. If the person makes you nervous [which they do to control the situation], it may be wise to have someone else in the room when you are talking with them.

If the person criticises you or pelts you with sarcastic comments that offend you, keep the conversation focused on the solution and don't acknowledge their inappropriateness. In cases like this, it gives you more power if you remember to act rather than to react. Don't play their game as they are trying to make you feel unstable. In a difficult conversation, the first person to get mad loses.

When dealing with a person who is cold and closed off, you need to consider that they may have a hidden agenda. Ask open-ended questions and be patient, it may take a little while but they will open up when they feel safe.

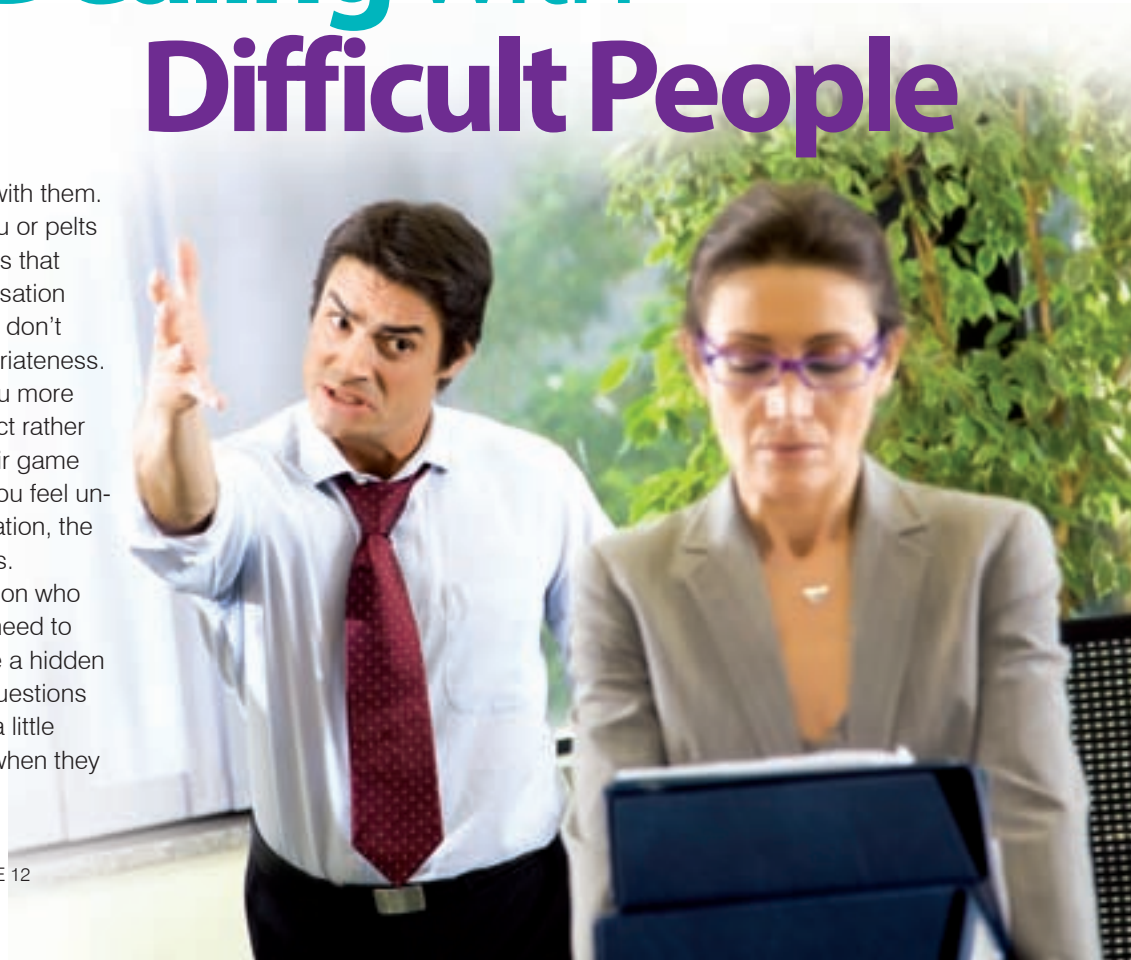
Perhaps, one of the most difficult people to deal with is someone who is arrogant. People who engage in this behaviour are usually trying to cover up their own insecurity. They may be trying to avoid taking responsibility for a problem which will be made obvious if they try to blame others. Dealing with them effectively requires that you know you're in the right. It also helps to have documentation to back up your observations.

When someone continually complains it can bring down an entire group of people and, perhaps, even a company. This kind of cynicism is

uncomfortable for everyone around him or her. The best way to deal with it is to not allow them to complain unless they also present a solution to the issue. This will greatly reduce their ability to affect you and their fellow team members.

Some people talk so much that they are unable to hear anyone else. A great technique is to tell them as they begin that you only have a minute. If they continue bending your ear, don't be afraid to interrupt and tell them that you [and, they] have to get back to what you were doing when the conversation began.

Dealing with Difficult People



If someone is not doing his or her fair share around the office it can be very frustrating. These people can put more effort into finding short-cuts than what it would take to just do the job. Don't cover for them; that's what they want you to do. If they ask for help or advice, have them create a list of what it is they need to accomplish. People who are prone to procrastinating are also usually unfocused and disorganised. To deal with them, set firm timelines and emphasise the importance of meeting them. Be sure they know there are consequences if the timelines are not met. This will help to eliminate any excuses that they can think of. Make sure they give you a firm commitment and follow-up, follow-up, follow-up.

Finally, some people hold on to

10 Issue Resolution Questions

Here are 10 questions leaders and team members need to ask themselves before taking it to the next level.

Ask yourself:

1. What am I after?
2. Am I part of the problem?
3. Am I trying to cast blame?
4. Is there old stuff that I am using to fuel this fire?
5. How did this all get started?
6. What can I do to prevent this from happening in the future?
7. Am I in the right frame of mind to deal appropriately with this person/situation?
8. What will happen if I just let it be?
9. What will happen if I try to take control?
10. What is the best thing for all concerned [team members, company, client]?

After you or your team member has considered some of the questions above, you then need to take a moment and consider how to present it. The techniques below are specifically designed to facilitate business people in dealing with co-workers. Take the time to think before you act, and this means E-mail too.

10 Resolution Preparation Techniques

1. Sleep on an issue, especially if you're angry
2. Make sure that if you share the issue you're not ragging on someone
3. Before you share it, think about who you're talking to [and about]
4. Talk with a friend/spouse after [work] hours to get a read on your feelings
5. Write it out [pros and cons]
6. Forget about it
7. If we think a conversation is going to be painful, remember that you usually feel better after it's over
8. Go to the person and deal with it — NOW
9. Remember, and be kind. It's hard to put the toothpaste back in the tube
10. Feel good about yourself and how you handled it.

Now, it is time to take action [and, no action is still an action]. So, ask yourself the appropriate questions, think first and consider which of the techniques above will be most helpful to you and your team. If an issue is presented to you, there is only one appropriate initial response. For example, "Thank you for bringing this to my attention."

These questions and techniques are also very helpful when dealing with customer and client problems. Issues happen daily. It's how we receive and resolve them that separate successful companies from the rest.

every negative thing that has ever happened. They are not good team players and tend to work best in isolation. Take the pre-emptive approach with them, before you start, clarify that you are not present to rehash old conflicts. If past conflicts begin to surface cut the person off quickly and return to the issue at hand.

Sometimes we cannot deal with difficult types and we must move them on [or, move on yourself]. Life is too short to work [or, hang out] with people who make you miserable. One of the best tools for keeping a team together is making sure they get along. If the problem persists, you may want to rethink your motivation for continuing to work with someone who continues to behave in a difficult manner.

Dealing with difficult people is an art form. Those who are good at it tend to be successful in life and business [or, they become therapists]. Knowing how someone is likely to behave is helpful, especially in an uncomfortable situation. Trust your instincts and don't let them grind you down.

Resolving issues

Joe Phelps, CEO of the Phelps Group and author of the new book, *Pyramids are Tombs*, has a method that has kept his company humming, his profits up and his turnover low. They don't believe in rules at the Phelps Group; they only hire adults, so there is no need to tell people how to behave. Joe encourages his team members who have an issue with someone else in the company to approach that person and deal directly with them. If that doesn't work, they then bring in two other team members who know both the people involved, and try to work things out. If necessary, as a final step, someone outside the team can be brought into facilitate a resolution. This is a great way to create harmony and respect in a work environment, so much so, most issues would never be brought to the table in the first place.

Stay Well

Barton Goldsmith, PhD, an award-winning and highly sought-after keynote speaker, business consultant and internationally syndicated author, has helped develop creative and balanced leadership in several *Fortune* 500 companies, educational institutions, and government organisations worldwide. He lives in California, US. Website: www.BartonGoldsmith.com