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DIFFICULT PEOPLE: You Can Deal With Them

Everyone is irritable or indecisive at times. But some people are so difficult that they make others' lives and the workplace a strain. Dealing with difficult people is easier when you learn to recognize some common personality types. Then you can develop coping skills for dealing with each without trying to change them.

Difficult Personalities

There are seven behavior types with which most people have difficulty.

- *Bullies* are hostile and angry, throwing tantrums to get their way.
- *Grippers* complain about things they don't like, but rarely try to change their situation.
- *Silent types* don't say much: you can beg, yell, or talk to them but they don't say more than "yes" or "no."
- *Very nice people* seem to agree with you but won't do what they say they will.
- *Just say no types* respond to new ideas with "That won't work."
- *I know better types* think they know everything. They're condescending and full of themselves.
- *Stallers* put things off until someone else takes over, or until the decision is made because of the delay.

How To Cope

These behaviors are annoying and upsetting. They keep everyone but the difficult person off balance. This can be true even though they may not be trying to control others. Coping balances the power between people. It helps everyone get things done without stalling at the roadblocks difficult people set up. When someone practices difficult behaviors around you, try these techniques:

- For *bullies*, stand up for yourself. Use phrases like "I believe" or "I feel". Don't try to fight them. Instead, make your point firmly.
- Let *grippers* know you've heard their concern. Ask directly, "What is it you want?"
- For *silent types*, ask questions that must be answered by more than "yes" or "no." If you get no response, let the silent type know your plans.
- *Very nice people* have a strong need to be liked; show them that you do. Then dig to find out what's really happening.
- Don't argue with *just say no types*. Instead, suggest what won't work before they do.
- For *I know better types*, have all the facts before you meet. Raise possible problems; be ready to follow through.
- Listen to *stallers*; find out what the real reason for the delay is. Help them, and ask them for help.

Worth The Effort

You can't always avoid difficult people. Learning to cope with them is worth the effort. You'll get more done and be less frustrated if you do.