

**Difficult Co-Workers**



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**Topics**



- Work Temperament, Organization and Mission
- Definition of Difficult
- Worker Influences and Mind Sets
- Reasons for Difficulty and Disruptions
- Difficulty Types
- Resolution Strategies



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**Difficult Co-Workers**



Each week we spend our time in a work setting. This can be in an office or a remote location. We represent our agency and must ensure we are viewed as a cohesive team.



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**Work Temperament** 

The foundation of working with others includes treating coworkers with:

- Kindness
- Dignity
- Respect
- Cooperation
- Harmony



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**Your Organization** 

- Comprised of variously talented, experienced, and knowledgeable persons
- Working together toward a common goal
- Where differences in each person are recognized as contributing to the organization's success
- Sometimes "disruptors" in the form of difficult coworkers may be found



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**Your Mission** 

Your agency's mission is to develop and function as a team.

The "enemy" is too often "At the Gates." Generally in the form of competitors.

You do not need the "enemy" within the gates.



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**Difficult Coworkers** 

Due to the differences within each of us, there is the potential for individuals to become difficult

- Refusing to cooperate on projects
- Refusing to work with certain individuals
- Allowing negatives to outweigh the positives within the organization



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**"Difficult" Defined** 

"Hard to be pleased or satisfied; not readily yielding; not compliant; unaccommodating; rigid; austere; not easily managed or persuaded."  
(Webster's Dictionary)

- Such temperaments can disrupt the harmony and distract you from your mission.
- In some cases, such conditions may be highly toxic to an organization!
- If permitted to continue these conditions will prove ruinous to your people and agency!

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**How Co-Workers Differ** 

There are also differences in each workplace, generational or otherwise, encompassing varying values. Some include:

1. Philosophy
2. Reasoning
3. Tolerance
4. Judgment
5. Aptitude
6. Spirituality
7. Morality
8. Work Ethics



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**Outside Influences** 

Dr. T. H. Holmes and Dr. R. H. Rahe, Life Change Units, considering the impact to a person and health risks include the areas of:

- Work Events
- Personal Issues
- Financial State
- Social Condition
- Family Concerns



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**Mind Sets** 

Altruistic	Egotistical	Messianic
Questioning	Spiteful	Arguer
Detached	Complaining	Belligerent
Introverted	Extroverted	Uncooperative
Retreating	Phobic	



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**Reasons for Difficulty** 

- Personality includes the mind sets
- Outlook, how they view themselves in the organization or wish how others would see them
- Impacts on their lives over which they have little or no control
- Personal philosophy
- Problems at home brought to work



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### Disruptors



- Confrontational
- Habits
- Issues
- Negativity
- Presumptions



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### Difficulty Types



Although only viewing coworkers, some of these traits can be found in bosses. These are but a few of the types:



Mirror-Mirror: may possess similar attributes you possess with which you're not happy

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### Difficulty Types



Negative: does not or will not become a team member. Refuses to conform.

<u>You Say</u>	<u>They Say</u>
Up	Down
In	Out
Left	Right



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**Difficulty Types**

**Gossiper:** Brings down the organization by slandering individuals or the entire group thereby creating dissension

Deal with rumors and gossip immediately

Have policies against each and enforce the policies



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**Difficulty Types**

**"Me-Me"** Must be the one to receive the credit or insists on swinging the group's direction toward their presumed goal. No compromise. No credit to team or others-must always be in the limelight. Will go to great lengths to succeed.

Can be found in coworkers as well as some bosses



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**Difficulty Types**

**Time Thief:** makes a concerted effort to distance themselves from the work. Engages others in distracting conversation; figures time away from the effort will still be paid time without having to produce. Others have to do their work for them.



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**Difficulty Types** 

Eternal Victim Mystique:

Attitude is

- It is not their fault
- Everyone else is to blame
- Others are out to "get them"
- Refuse to accept responsibility for their actions or lack thereof



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**Difficulty Types** 

Plotter or Saboteur: determines to conduct business in a negative fashion so they won't have to perform future duties in that area

Plans to fail. Enough failures and negative reports will result in a feeling of mistrust and they won't have to perform in the future.



Their strategy: work or not, you still have to pay me. Purposeful self-destruction which erodes the team concept and the organization.

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**Difficulty Types** 

Bullies: can be bosses or coworkers. They diminish the worth and value of coworkers if not stopped. Work by intimidation. Usually have an inferiority complex or are insecure.

Bullying Types:

- Physical-striking or pushing
- Verbal-intimidation or belittling
- Relationship-not talking to or including others in their circle



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**Difficulty Types**

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Situational difficulty: due to short- or long-term impacts. Home life, medical problems, and other problems may be the cause of lack of cooperation. Due to distraction, not planned.



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**Resolution Strategies**

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You are not a psychologist but you can perform specific actions to reduce the difficulty.

Correct the problem  
Transfer the problem  
Get rid of the problem  
Leave the problem by seeking other employment

Some say, "Just get rid of the problem!" (Easier said than done)

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**Gaining Cooperation**

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- Understand the situation
- Analyze the reason for the difficulty
- Connect with coworkers
- Talking it out
- Manage emotions



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### Understand the Situation



Before you get stressed-out by another's behavior, learn what the true situation is

Is it due to their general nature or something far afield of normal behavior?

Remember the multiple impacts on each of us and how they can manifest in the workplace



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### Analyze the Reason



Is it perhaps you who might trigger something in the other person?

This is something you'll need to determine.



Is it the other person's manner?

Is something else affecting their attitude?

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### Connect with Coworkers



Have a 1-on-1 conversation

- Indicate the problem and ask how you might be able to change the relationship
- Don't be negative but attempt to develop a rapport
- You may have to "give ground" to establish a linkage with the person



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**Talking It Out** 

- First construct what you will say and make notes. Focus on the main issues. Anticipate counters
- Acknowledge the tension which exists
- Describe the tension causing behavior
- Be specific with examples
- Inform how these examples affect you
- Ask what you can do to build a better relationship

This is a good time to employ Active Listening techniques 

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**Manage Emotions** 

Do not be negative-you want to solve the problem 

Realize that maybe they are not a "people person"

If you resolved the situation, that's at least a beginning 

No resolution may mean a supervisor or other may be needed to remedy the situation

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**Supervisor/Manager Involvement** 

- Sometimes the involvement of Supervisors or Managers is necessary to deal with a difficult co-worker.
- The following steps are suggested for confronting conflicts that may arise between employees.
- **Invite Conversation:**
  - A clear picture of the problem is necessary therefore invite each of the individuals involved to confidential, one-on-one conversations with you.
  - Confidentiality and neutrality are important.
  - Truly listen to each party separately and seriously consider their unique perspectives.

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**Supervisor/Manager Involvement** 

- **Validate and Take Notes:**
  - During the conversations, validate what your employees express, even if you don't necessarily agree with their perspectives.
  - Validating helps get past the emotions and increases employees' buy-in to move into a collaborative space to come up with solutions.
  - Take notes during these meetings and read back what you've documented which will help maintain clarity of the situation and lets employees know you're listening and actually taking them seriously.
  - In each session, be sure to ask employees what solutions they may be able to identify on their own which will be helpful later.

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**Supervisor/Manager Involvement** 

- **Facilitate a Joint Meeting:**
  - Once you've spoken with both parties independently, determine whether it will be effective to facilitate a conversation between them.
  - The only time it would be inappropriate to have the two conflicting employees come together is if the solution isn't interpersonal but instead requires policy change.
  - Normally facilitating a conversation between both employees is in everyone's best interest.
  - As the leader, the Supervisor or Manager needs to manage the conversation.

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**Supervisor/Manager Involvement** 

- **Guidelines for dialogue during the meeting:**
  - Set up the room to have a circle or triangle of chairs without anything else in the way.
  - Assure those attending that the discussion will be confidential.
  - Disclose what grievances exist between both parties.
  - Ask each employee to state what they believe would be effective solutions for the issue(s) which may require brainstorming.
  - Nobody should leave the room until at least one workable, actionable solution in place for each issue.
  - Ask employees to commit to follow through on their part of the solution.

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Supervisor/Manager Involvement



• **Implementation and Accountability:**

- o Once solutions have been negotiated they should be implemented as soon as possible (ASAP).
- o Quick implementation helps build trust that the issue(s) was(were) taken seriously and everyone is committed to making necessary changes.
- o Supervisors/Managers need to develop accountability measures to assure employees will stick to their roles in the solution(s).
- o If employees are not sticking to commitments made, early intervention by the Supervisor or Manager is required.

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Supervisor/Manager Involvement



• **Adjustments:**

- o A first attempt at a solution may not work – do not try and force something or pretend it's working.
- o Make changes as necessary but address and make them quickly.

• **Ongoing Prevention:**

- o Consider implementing team-building events including off-site team building.
- o Implement some type of interpersonal activity that is challenging and interactive.
- o Friendly, team-inspired competition may be good.

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Policies and Enforcement



Work with various agencies to construct your policies

- Human Resources
- The Union
- Legal Department



Policies indicate expectations of staff and remedies (penalties) which will be enacted due to non-compliance

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**Policies and Enforcement** 

- Enact policies compliant with recognized Federal and State agencies
- These best guarantee equality in treatment and conformance to accepted laws and standards
- Ensure staff knows what is expected of each employee to maintain a cohesive Team
- Hold staff accountable for breaking policies

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**Hindrances to Resolving** 

Excuses played:  
This can be various counters to corrective instruction so the person does not have to comply. Anticipate for discussion.

Union Intervention:  
What will the Union support. Sometimes a Union may support the problem rather than attempt to effect change.

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**Hindrances to Resolving** 

Management Involvement:  
May require Supervisor, Manager, Director become involved. Sometimes they will not address the difficulty head-on, hoping it will just "go away."

Fear of legal suit against individuals or agency if enforcement is attempted. This will require legal advice to resolve.

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**Unresolved Issues** 

Will affect your staff behaviorally, emotionally and physically. No one likes to work in an environment with:

- Low morale or totally demoralized staff
- Stress
- High worker turnover
- Reduced trust in management and coworkers
- A hostile environment



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**Staff Training** 

Call a joint meeting of staff.  
Indicate:

- Expectations of staff
- Need for cooperation
- Requirements of job description
- Actions permitted to be taken by supervision & management



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**You Fail If:** 

- The problem is not confronted
- If the person refuses to cooperate
- If rules are not enforced
- If Supervision and Management refuse to address the issue(s)
- If the problem is not resolved



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**You Succeed If:**

- Problem is confronted and resolved favorably
- Cooperation is gained
- Policies are addressed and enforced equitably
- The team is restored
- Staff can focus on their work and productivity without intrusive conflicts



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**Success or Failure**

- No success is guaranteed
- Failure may be assured by some supervisors and managers who do not want to get involved. Some may think the situation may be "self-healing."
- However, count on the disruptor to be the winner if not addressed and if it continues to erode your staff



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**Summary**

- Address the problem "head-on"
- Determine the true reasons for the problem
- Resolve through communication and compromise and policy
- Involve supervision and management in the resolution process, as necessary
- If unresolved, determine alternative measures toward resolution

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**Contact Information**



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**Questions**





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**IUP OSHA Consultation Program**



**Telephone Number 1-800-382-1241**



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**Other Suggested Programs** 

The following presentations are also available to supplement your in-house program:

- Active Shooter – Basic
- Dealing with Angry People
- Safety Culture, Parts 1 & 2
- Workplace Violence
- Workplace Violence in Healthcare Facilities



Please contact us for a full list of other programs available to you free of charge.

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