

► Dealing with Difficult People

It's bound to happen. There's a co-worker or maybe even your boss who makes every encounter an unpleasant one. You can't stay out of their way forever, but you can try some of these strategies when you deal with difficult people on the job.

DO's

- Try to remain calm—you may be angry on the inside but don't let them see you sweat (or boil).
- Give the other person a full chance to speak—when they're finished, then it's your turn.
- Ask specific questions to see exactly what's on the other person's mind.
- Deal with the immediate situation—don't rehash past incidents. ("Did this incident happen yesterday or last week?")
- You may need to call in some help—contact your association rep.
- If the other person looks like they may get physical, try to find a way to move them to another room—again, you may need outside help.
- Set limits. ("It's all right to be angry, but it's not all right to use profanity.")
- Listen carefully to what's being said instead of planning your reply.
- Be aware of body language—it often says more than any words can.
- Be consistent in how you deal with this person—don't try to act differently as a way of getting at them.
- Remember—you can't change other people's behavior, but you can change your attitude toward them.

DON'Ts

- Don't try to "cheer up" the person.
- Don't tell them that their problems are not as bad as they seem.
- Don't try to reassure them or give them advice unless they ask for it.
- Don't try to solve the whole problem; just deal with what is at hand.
- Don't overreact.
- Don't get into a power struggle—you may lose.
- Don't make false promises or promises you can't keep.
- If you can't be sincere in your interest in the other person's situation, don't fake attention.
- Speak clearly and straightforwardly.
- Don't hesitate to ask for help from your association rep—you may discover that you're not the only target of this difficult person's behavior.