



Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

August 2006

Dealing with Difficult Behaviors

Finding Better Ways to Avoid Conflict

Conflict is inevitable. At home, at work, anywhere and everywhere people come together, sooner or later conflict will make an appearance. Difficult behavior makes conflict more likely, and can include any behavior that inhibits your personal happiness, performance or job satisfaction.

If left unaddressed, difficult behavior can alienate friends, family and co-workers. It can destroy relationships. It can cost organizations in productivity and the loss of good employees. But learning to deal with such behavior can help stop conflict before it starts.

Most difficult behavior is accidental, but it can also be the result of intentional actions. It can be sporadic, occurring under certain circumstances or conditions or between certain people, and it can be repetitive pattern behavior.

According to professional mediator John Ford, gossiping, ignoring orders, refusing to talk, being rude, yelling and harassing all are examples of difficult behaviors. Ford says difficult behavior is often a result of psychological needs for

control, recognition, affection, and respect. Patterns emerge when difficult behavior is rewarded, even unintentionally. The best way to eliminate such behavior is to prevent it. Once it appears, don't let it go unaddressed.

Decide whether the difficult behavior is intentional. At work, if you think a co-worker is purposely trying to sabotage your success or the success of a project, get management involved. But if you believe the person's intentions are good, then observe and isolate the

Tips To Diffuse Difficult Behavior

In his book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Dealing with Difficult Employees," Robert Bacal gives the following tips¹:

- **Stay centered.** Don't take things personally, and don't think of the person as difficult. Instead, focus on the behavior.
- **Reality check.** Is the behavior genuinely causing performance problems, or is it affecting you personally?
- **Listen.** Make an extra effort to hear what the person is saying. This action alone can sometimes diffuse difficult behavior.
- **Give feedback.** People aren't always aware their behavior is causing problems.
- **Get a third party involved.** When difficult behavior is intentional, or embedded deeply enough that you can't see a way out, ask someone else to mediate.

Taking these steps can help minimize difficult behaviors, but don't expect instant results. Changing behavior takes time.

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behavior, making sure to distinguish it from the person.

Then, decide whether the better option is finding a way to tolerate the behavior and work around it, or confronting the person

directly. How can you tell? One way is by observing whether the behavior has a direct effect on performance and happiness. Are other people in your home or office affected by it as well? If they are, it's a problem that needs to be addressed.

Sometimes life can feel overwhelming. If you find that you are having trouble doing daily tasks or that problems are affecting your relationships with friends and family, you should consider seeking professional counseling.

Asking for help is never a sign of weakness or failure, especially in situations too difficult to handle alone. UBH is here to help. Call or log on anytime for help with any of life's challenges. ■

Confronting Difficult Behavior



There are three general approaches to dealing with difficult behaviors.

The first is to **avoid it**. Personalities differ. Some people rub others the wrong way. If someone's behavior at work irritates you but doesn't affect your performance, do what you can to minimize your exposure to it. If someone's behavior irritates you at home, however, you may need to try the other two approaches.

Second, see if you can **make the behavior irrelevant**. If someone regularly pushes your buttons, hide the buttons. You're not giving approval or acceptance of their behavior, you're simply

removing your reaction to it. If you can't free yourself from needing them to change, it becomes more your problem than theirs.

The third and most difficult solution is to **address their behavior**, but in many cases it's the only appropriate solution. Once you've decided to address someone's behavior, proceed slowly enough so that your concerns are not misconstrued as "reactive."

Work out what you plan to say in advance, and consider different responses and how to handle them. Follow

these tips for effective communication:

- Describe the actual behavior rather than evaluating that behavior. In other words, "You were crossing your arms and rolling your eyes," rather than, "That was a lousy way to listen to me."
- Be specific. General comments give nothing to work with. Direct comments toward a behavior that the person can do something about.
- Make comments that are well-timed and well-intended.
- Give the person an opportunity to repeat what you say.

The truth is, we all can be difficult from time to time. Often, we're not even aware that our behavior is making someone else's life or job difficult. Communication can go a long way toward preventing such conflict, which can make everyone's life easier and more productive. ■

Resources

United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

www.liveandworkwell.com

The Benchmark Institute

http://www.benchmarkinstitute.org/t_by_t/difficult_behavior/index.htm

Provides ongoing education to the public interest community through its Core Programs in Legal Skills and Leadership, including a series of articles about difficult behavior.

¹ "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Dealing with Difficult Employees," by Robert Bacal. Alpha; 2000. 352 pp.