



## *Leadership Tips*

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### *How to Deal with Difficult Personalities*

In many work situations, some co-workers are easy to work with, while others may be tough. It is, however, everyone's responsibility to ensure that customers' needs and business goals are met. Mastering skills to get along with different personalities may be both a challenging task and a most rewarding accomplishment.

Leadership Tips last issue stated that some problematic workplace behaviors may be habitual, caused by unrealistic expectations and low tolerance for employees' learning curves or mistakes. Perhaps communication styles may clash. Sometimes, though, co-workers may have acted in an overly aggressive manner.

Before you react to actions of others, assess the circumstances that are causing you problems. Are the conditions and negative behaviors circumstantial or habitual? If someone is reacting in an unusual way, your best response may be empathy and giving him or her the benefit of the doubt. However, if communication problems or aggressive behaviors are habitual, it works best to communicate appropriately and to be assertive.

Consider consciously modifying your responses to improve the outcome of the situation you face.

Many workplace disagreements happen because people have different styles of communication. They can't properly process the information from each other. Even if they concur, they don't acknowledge each other's agreement. Though there are several models that explain different communication styles, we recommend recognizing two basic styles:

**Fast-Paced Communication:** Do you need brief responses? Are you listening for the bottom line? Are you thinking, "Make this quick?" when someone tries to explain something? If you answer yes to these questions, you are probably a fast-paced communicator.

**Slow-Paced Communication:** Do you hear or explain things in detail or in a logical sequence? Do you like to draw pictures to explain your ideas? Do you ask questions for more information or clarification? If you answer yes to these questions, you are a slow-paced communicator.

People can experience frustration, feelings of not being heard, or confusion when they encounter others with different communication styles. To surmount these difficulties it pays to know your own predominant style and quickly determine the styles of those you work with. Then you can learn how to mirror others' styles in order to make them feel comfortable and to better inform, influence, or motivate them.

In addition to styles, there are three behaviors describing how people respond to touchy or difficult situations. Once again it's useful to determine your own typical response. The three behaviors include:

**Silent/Passive:** People who respond passively, or who are unable to respond at all, send “I’m not good enough” messages. They are often disregarded and typically bow to others’ wants and needs. They can become victims. Their behavior communicates: *“Whatever you say.”*

**Assertive:** People who are assertive are active, direct, and honest. They show respect for self and others and seek “win-win” situations through listening, collaboration, and negotiating. They encourage honest, open relationships. Their behavior communicates: *“I have my opinion, and I’d like to hear yours.”*

**Actively or Passively Aggressive:** People who are actively or passively aggressive are often perceived to have superior attitudes or to be rude. They put their own wants and needs first, allowing others little choice but to follow their lead. Either they must win or they will retaliate. Their behavior communicates: *“My way or the highway.”*

To improve your ability to deal with other people’s behaviors in tough situations, we suggest the following:

- Assess your typical behavior: Are you predominantly passive or silent?  
Assertive? Aggressive?
- Strive to be assertive by applying positive attitudes and listening mindfully to counter aggressive personalities. Mindful listening helps you discern the essence behind someone’s words. It allows you to pay attention to what is being said, using active listening phrases, such as, “I see” and “Can you say more.”  
Summarize what you have heard and ask questions to ensure understanding.
- Try a simple practice to increase your ability to listen without interruption; count two seconds after someone stops talking before you start talking. If you feel the

urge to interrupt, take a deep breath instead and focus on what the other person is saying. You may be surprised how many times you may think someone has stopped talking when they have just paused to collect their thoughts. In time you will notice this practice allows others to reflect and be more open and thorough.

- Have confidence in your ideas and abilities. Respond by saying how you feel, sticking with the facts without blame or judgment. Also seek common ground for agreement.

The Consulting Team offers trainings in building the skills to recognize difficult behaviors and deal with different communication styles. You can assess your personal style, learn new communication skills, and practice being assertive. To find out about The Consulting Team's services go to: [www.http://theconsultingteam.com/offerings/](http://theconsultingteam.com/offerings/)