

How To: Deal with Difficult People



Sometimes the most challenging aspect of your job is not the task itself, but the people with whom you are required to work to get the job done. Whether faced with difficult customers, difficult coworkers, or even difficult bosses, dealing with difficult people and behaviors can lead to significant frustration, anger, and stress. Your personality style, mood of the moment, and stress level in general will significantly impact your ability to coolly cope with difficult people. Ultimately, though, a few simple tools can be used to regain your control and keep your cool.

1. *Breathe deeply* – You can reset your system, at least physically, by taking a few cleansing breaths. Once your body starts to relax, your mind will follow suit. It’s hard to stay upset while purposely engaging your relaxation response.
2. *Take a break* – Engaging with a difficult person once they’ve already pushed your buttons isn’t likely to end up in a successful outcome. Take a walk to the restroom and back, or just step away from the situation, even if for a minute. Take the time to clear your head to prevent your frustrations from escalating.
3. *Take a problem-solving approach* – Oftentimes, difficult behavior stems from a need for help or resolution. Sift through the emotional content and put on your problem-solving hat. Identifying the concrete issue will lead to faster identification of solutions, and decrease the chance that you’ll lose your cool. The majority of the time, when people become difficult with you, it has nothing to do with you personally.
4. *Communicate clearly* – Make sure you understand the reason for the difficult behavior. Let the difficult person know what you’re doing to solve the problem. Avoid engaging in workplace gossip or raising your voice as an outlet.



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