



How to Deal with Difficult People

Dealing with difficult people can wear you out, rile you up, and frustrate the heck out of you. It's no fun negotiating with someone who is being hostile and uncooperative.

But did you know, that there are ways to interact with people who are angry that stack the odds in your favor that they will be more flexible, kind and reasonable?

Here are 3 tips that are likely to help regulate their nervous system and set the foundation for a more productive, and peaceful conversation.

1. Listen:

When you are in a conflict with someone, listening is sometimes the last thing you want to do. It's natural to want to explain your point of view, set a boundary, or help them understand why they are wrong. While there is certainly a place for this later, when you jump to this first, even if you have the most reasonable argument in the world, it may fall on deaf ears, or worse, make them escalate. Turning your focus to being curious, and understanding their world, no matter how unreasonable it may seem they are being, can go a long way towards helping them feel heard, and ultimately calm down.

Try asking questions about their experience, what their concerns are, and reflect back the feelings and thoughts you are hearing. "I hear that you are worried about your daughter, and are scared that intervening in this way could ultimately hurt her. Can you tell me more what you are

concerned might happen?

2. Appreciate them:

(It's counterintuitive but stick with me here): Everyone likes to be appreciated. When we compliment the attributes someone is displaying, or what we appreciate about them, even in this difficult moment, it can help the other person feel more cared for. "I hear that you are angry about this, and I am really appreciating how much you care about your students" When someone is being difficult, they are usually feeling hurt, misunderstood scared, or unseen. When they feel your care from your appreciation, and the fact that you can still see good in them, even in this difficult moment, they may begin to calm down, and be better able to see you are on the same team. The trick is to be sincere, and to connect to that part of you that does have real appreciation and care for this person, even if they are showing up in a way that is challenging in this moment.

3. Diffuse:

When dealing with someone who is being difficult, it can be easy to write the other person off as being totally unreasonable and dismissing their arguments. Sometimes it is true they are being unreasonable, and a lot of the time, they actually have a point. The way they are saying it might be extreme, feel unnecessarily hurtful, or untrue in its entirety, but there is usually a bit of truth you can acknowledge. And while it might feel like you are giving up your power, in many cases, it actually gets the other person to stop their attack. They may only have escalated their attack because they thought you didn't get it, and now, they have no more fuel to continue. They are disarmed. See if you can find a small piece of truth in what they are saying and acknowledge it. For example, if parent says "you're incompetent," you don't agree that you are incompetent, but you might be able to acknowledge that the intervention you tried wasn't helpful, "I didn't follow through on that, and I see that it impacted you." Or if a teachers complains that you are making them use a new Learning Management System you can say, "Yes, using a new LMS requires time and can feel overwhelming". You are not saying they don't need to do it, you are simply acknowledging a small truth.

After following these 3 simple steps, the person you are communicating with will usually feel heard and more connected to you. Which can lead to them being more receptive to hearing your perspective and to the problem being resolved.

Thanks for reading!

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