Dealing With Difficult People

“The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast.”

Oscar Wilde

University of Puget Sound
Professional Development and Enrichment Conference
January 11, 2016
Dennis Hopwood
Lady Astor

“Winston, if I were your wife I’d put poison in your coffee.”

Winston Churchill

“Nancy, if I were your husband I’d drink it.”
Agenda

- Ground Rules
- Defining Difficult Behavior
- Resolving Conflict
- Tools and Techniques
- Negotiation
Ground Rules

1. No ‘sacred cows’...nothing is off-limits.
2. Las Vegas rules apply.
3. Participate! Contribute! Be fully engaged.
4. Respect personal differences, values, diverse viewpoints.
5. Use humor to encourage and energize others.
6. Points, clarifications, questions are welcome at any time.
7. Listen respectfully. Allow others to speak uninterrupted.
8. Hold one conversation at a time.
10. Stand up and walk around when you need to.
11. Manage interruptions. Turn off electronic devices.
Defining Difficult Behavior
Dimensional Model of Behavior*

*Psychological Associates

**Horizontal Axis**
How one handles people.

**Vertical Axis**
How one handles situations.

**Direct**

- **Q1**
  - Aggressive
  - Demanding
  - Forces Ideas
  - Controlling

- **Q4**
  - Assertive
  - Inquiring
  - Supportive
  - Open

**Indirect**

- **Q2**
  - Aloof
  - Cautious
  - Guarded
  - Risk-Averse

- **Q3**
  - Overly Friendly
  - Superficial
  - Agreeable
  - Appeasing

**Without regard for others**

**Responsive**
**Dimensional Model of Behavior**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1 Needs</th>
<th>Q4 Needs</th>
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<tr>
<th>Q2 Needs</th>
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- **Q1 Needs:** Independence, esteem, control, autonomy, influence.
- **Q2 Needs:** Security, esteem, predictability, stability, low risk.
- **Q3 Needs:** Socializing, security, esteem, acceptance, interaction, harmony.
- **Q4 Needs:** Self-realization, independence, control, growth, collaboration.

**They’re all about results...and control**

- **Competition:** They’re collaborative and respectful. They want to get things done!

**They don’t want to rock the boat. They don’t like change.**

- **Avoidance:** They’re all about results and control.

- **Collaboration:** They’re collaborative and respectful. They want to get things done!

- **Accommodation:** They want to be friends and avoid controversial situations.

*Psychological Associates*
“If you’re horrible to me, I’m going to write a song about it, and you won’t like it. That’s how I operate.”

Taylor Swift
What is Difficult Behavior?

• Behavior that makes it hard for you to do your work.

• An interaction that’s unpleasant and/or hurtful.

• The result of either party’s psychological needs for control, recognition, affection, and respect.

• Behavior that is disruptive and counter-productive to the best interests and goodwill of the University and its constituents.
It Takes Many Forms

Arrogant
Explosive
Whining (*Eeyore*)
Self-absorbed
Indecisive
Demanding
Threatening
Unreliable
Withholding
Negative
Perfectionist

Super-agreeable
Martyr
Lackadaisical
Stubborn
Uncooperative
Impatient
Passive-aggressive
Manipulative
Condescending
Defensive
Procrastinating
An Important Distinction

**Difficult Behavior**

*Persistent, uncalled-for treatment*
Unpleasant, rude, sarcastic, nasty, cynical, demeaning, disrespectful, uncooperative, negative, bullying.

vs.

**Difficult Situation**

*Conflict, emotion, over-reaction*
Situational, not a regular pattern. Caused by stressful differences or circumstances that pose an obstacle.
Examples of Difficult Behavior

- Threatening statements or physically hostile demeanor.
- Harassment, abusive expression (verbal, written, digital), rude treatment, raised voice, bullying and intimidation, projection.
- Profanity or culturally offensive remarks directed at a person.
- Inappropriate topics of conversation, pictures, objects.
- Unwarranted physical contact; no sense of boundaries.
- Sabotaging or preventing others from doing their jobs.
- Passive-aggressive manipulation and resistance.
- Withdrawn demeanor (withholding); avoidance, delay.
- Conspicuous exclusion of others, or personal isolation.
- Abuse of authority.
- Negativity, pessimism, defensiveness, chronic complaints.
- Judgmental, opinionated, and hostile expression.
- Taking credit for the work of others.
Reasons Behind Difficult Behavior

• They have a need to tell us something.
• They feel ‘triggered’ when their needs aren’t met (reflexive).
• They’re afraid we don’t understand or hear the seriousness of their problem (this is the story they tell themselves, as fact).
• They don’t believe we value their inputs and ideas.
• They’re afraid that if WE WIN, THEY LOSE.
• They’re afraid that we will blame or criticize them.
• They’re transferring anxiety over other issues (displacement).
• They need to be the center of attention (recognition/power).
• Feelings of powerlessness and stress make them combative.
• They dominate in order to feel more in control.
• They have unresolved issues from the past (victim persona).
• They enjoy hurting others (predatory anti-social personality).
## Conflict and Incivility

### Costs to the Individual

- Often significant physical problems; sleep disturbance.
- Reduced psychological well-being (self-esteem, depression, self-blame, anxiety, fear, burnout).
- Family tension and stress.
- High stress; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Work withdrawal, sickness absence; resignation.
- Distraction, reduced engagement, lower commitment, job dissatisfaction; performance decline.
- Social isolation, avoidance behavior.
## Conflict and Incivility

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<td>• Increased absenteeism and turnover.</td>
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<td>• Cost of recruiting and training replacements.</td>
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<td>• Lost productivity, engagement, creativity, innovation.</td>
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<td>• Dysfunctional work units.</td>
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<td>• Increased grievances/complaints, investigations, litigation, workers comp claims.</td>
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<td>• Increased management time dealing with conflict.</td>
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<td>• Loss of confidence in leadership; lower morale.</td>
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<td>• Damaged institutional image and reputation.</td>
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Sid Vicious

Scenario

Your manager, Sid Vicious, is known for his bad temper and mood swings. When talking to his employees, Sid is usually rude, condescending, and demeaning, sometimes yells, and is always unreasonably critical. Several of his employees have filed formal complaints with HR about Sid's abuse. Turnover is chronic in Sid’s department.

Question

Are Sid and the University liable for illegal harassment and creating a hostile work environment?
1. Yes, Sid's behavior is a classic example of a ‘hostile work environment.’

   INCORRECT.
   Although rude and abusive supervisors may be bad for morale and productivity, they won't violate Title VII – unless their misconduct has an adverse impact (greater effect) against employees of one sex, race, color, religion, age, pregnancy status, national origin, etc.

2. No, because Sid isn't discriminating based on any protected characteristic.

   CORRECT.
   Even if Sid's bullying behavior creates a ‘hostile work environment’ for his employees, he wouldn't necessarily violate Title VII. Title VII only forbids a ‘hostile work environment’ when harassment is based on employees' protected characteristics (such as their sex, race, color, age, religion, pregnancy status, national origin, etc.).
Hostile Work Environment
Legal Requirements

The actions, behavior or communication are unlawful when...

1. They discriminate against a protected class (age, religion, disability, sex, pregnancy, race, color, national origin, etc.).

2. They are pervasive, lasting over time, and not simply an annoying remark, petty slight, or isolated incident (unless extremely serious).

3. They are severe enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.

4. They seriously disrupt the employee’s work or interfere with the employee’s career progress.

5. Enduring the offensive conduct becomes a ‘de facto’ condition of continued employment.
“One's dignity may be assaulted, vandalized and cruelly mocked, but it can never be taken away unless it is surrendered.”

Michael J. Fox
Why You **Must** Deal With Difficult People

- We must stop the cycle! And put an end to the behavior.
- The situation won’t get better.
- Left unaddressed, it usually gets worse, can cause lasting damage, and can be harder to eventually resolve.
- Unchallenged intimidation reinforces unacceptable behavior.
- It’s likely that others are experiencing the same treatment.
We Get What We Allow*

1. Small acts of incivility start here
2. Incivility becomes ‘normalized’
3. Bullying, aggression, harassment and violence

*Civility, You and Mizzou, University of Missouri.
“I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

Elie Wiesel
Resolving Conflict
"In any dispute the intensity of feeling is inversely proportional to the value of the issues at stake."

Sayre’s Law, Wallace Stanley Sayre (1905–1972), Professor of Political Science, Columbia University.

"Academic politics is the most vicious and bitter form of politics, because the stakes are so low."

Your Own Experience

What is your instinctive reaction to confrontation?

• Avoidance.
• Silence, withdrawal, retreat.
• Get aggressive; take a stand.
• Deference, submissiveness, capitulation.
• Negotiation and compromise.
Your Own Experience

Think of an unpleasant interaction you had with a difficult person that ended poorly.

1. What did you experience?
2. How did you respond?
3. Looking back, what would you do differently?
Your Own Experience

Think of an unpleasant interaction you had with a difficult person that ended well.

1. What did you experience?
2. How did you respond?
3. What ensured a positive outcome?
4. What did you learn from this?
Conflict...What Works

1. First, establish the facts. Ask lots of open-ended questions.
2. Listen for truth in what they say. Pick your battles wisely.
4. Separate the person from the behavior.
6. Allow ventilation. Wait out the energy. Be non-reactive.
7. Acknowledge emotion, but focus on the issues and outcome.
8. Be open, flexible. Search for common ground.
10. Seek realistic Win-Win, or No Deal (avoid Zero Sum Game).
11. ‘ASK’ for commitment (Yes/No). Turn the tables. Set boundaries.
12. Signal that the relationship is your priority. Practice forgiveness.
Conflict...What Doesn’t Work

1. Explosive, angry, hurtful, resentful, sarcastic reactions.
2. ‘Taking the bait’ (provocation); buying into the emotional drama.
4. Generalizing, oversimplifying...words like “Always” and “Never”.
5. Using exaggeration, overstatement, and hyperbole.
6. Diversion; expanding the conflict (‘Kitchen Sink Effect’).
7. Being submissive. Playing the victim. ‘Clamming up’.
8. Buying into ‘zero sum game’; taking a rigid, entrenched stance.
12. Disparaging or culturally inappropriate remarks.
Consider This

Your identity is a ‘filtering’ set of perspectives derived from your values, experiences, memories, apprehensions, culture, etc.

We each have different and limited capacities to take on perspectives that are not our own. We are not as flexible as we think.

Holding two points of view simultaneously creates cognitive dissonance. We instinctively try to reduce psychological discomfort.

We’re each conflicted in our response to difference.
• Personal level...it’s threatening and contracting (ethno-centric).
• Group level...it’s embraced and expansive (world-centric).

Two people can hear or observe the same thing very differently.
“We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are”.

Anais Nin
Five Methods of Resolving Conflict

1. Withdrawal
2. Smoothing
3. Forcing
4. Compromise
5. Collaboration

“Be hard on the problem and soft on the person”
Reactions to Conflict

**Emotional Responses**
Anger, confusion, shame, sadness, fear.

**Physical Responses**
Sweaty palms, anxiety, rapid breathing, tension, tunnel vision, nausea. Hormonal surge...and, freeze.

**Cognitive Responses (Inner Voice)**
Thoughts, strategies: Manipulation, non-negotiation, emotional appeal, empathic understanding, personal rejection.

“I don’t want to be here! These people are crazy!”
“That jerk! Who does she think she is? What a sense of entitlement!”

**Behavioral Responses**
Infinitely varied. It’s mostly up to you (freeze exception).
More on Physical Response

Limbic System
• The storehouse of emotional memories.
• The opposite of Cerebral Cortex (thinking, logic, judgment).
• The Amygdala plays a primary role in the processing of memory, decision-making, emotional reactions.

Limbic ‘Surge’
• Incoming data triggers enough of an emotional charge that the Amygdala overrides the Cortex.

• Flood of hormones (catecholamines) from the adrenal glands, a surge of energy, preparing physical response to emotionally stressful stimuli (the ‘freeze, flight or fight’ survival reaction).

• Fear conditioning: Increases in heart rate, blood pressure, blood glucose. Research shows 20-minute recovery minimum.
When Confronted...
Slow Everything Down

Check Yourself
• Pause...maintain composure. Step back emotionally, before you respond.
• Be aware of your own thoughts and feelings.
• Sense your physical response ('freeze, flight, or fight' adrenal response).
• Control your body language: posture, breathing, facial expression, gestures.
• Consciously change your energy level.

Manage the Moment (Context)
• Pay attention to the physical space you’re in.
• Notice where you are by looking at the room.
• Make an effort to feel the floor beneath your feet.
• Listen to sounds in the room; notice the light source, people around you.

Notice the Person
• Demeanor, clothing, posture, face, tone of voice, communication style.
Focus on the Facts

1. What is the **real issue** (core problem)?
2. What is the **root cause**?
3. What is the **desired outcome**?
4. What are the **possible solutions**?
5. What is the **best solution**?
6. What are the **next steps**?
“Things present themselves to you, and it’s how you choose to deal with them that reveals who you are. We all say a lot of things, don’t we, about who we are and what we think. But in the end it’s your actions, how you respond to circumstance, that reveals your character.”

Cate Blanchett
Change How You Act

• Don’t try to change the difficult behavior.
• Model the behavior you would like to see.
• Let go of the need to be right or prove them wrong (save face).
• Consider what you don’t know, what you may have overlooked.
• Stop agreeing. Don’t appease. But don’t stay silent.
• Pause. Take a deep cleansing breathe. Use few words, carefully.
• Be comfortable with silence. Create a stable environment.
• ‘How’ you say it (tone) can be as important as ‘what’ you say.
• Pay attention to your own ‘triggers’ and to your body language.
• Know when to draw the line and bring in a higher authority.
• Stop talking and obsessing about it. Don’t be a victim. Let it go.
"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."

Victor Frankl
Tools and Techniques
Active Listening

Confident Body
- Straight posture.
- Make appropriate eye contact.
- Use open body posture.

Nonverbal encouragers
- Nod your head.
- Show supportive feelings with facial expressions and posture.
- Use appropriate hand gestures to communicate understanding.

Ask Clarifying Questions
- Open-ended questions, not statements.
- Probe for reasons.
- Ask for clarification.
- “Could you give me an example?”

Verbal Encouragers
- A calm, slow, reassuring tone of voice (with minimal intensity).
- “Yes, I see…”
- “Tell me more about that.”
- “Uh, huh…”
- “I hear what you’re saying…”
- “I want to understand what’s upset you.”

Paraphrase, Reflect, Summarize
- “So, what you’re saying is that you feel…Is that right?”
- “I can imagine how frustrating this must be for you.”
- “It sounds like the policy is unclear. How can I clarify it for you?”
- “What I’m hearing is…”
“Why would you say that?”

“Why is that so important to you?”

“I’m not sure I fully understand the key issue. Could you please restate your point?”

“I don’t believe I fully understand your concern. What exactly are you asking?”

“I thought I heard a “put down” (criticism) in what you just said. DID YOU MEAN IT THAT WAY?”

“We don’t have to agree on everything, DO WE?”
Address Disconnects

Immediately

Firmly, calmly interject...

“That’s not what I said.”

“That was not my question.”

“Please let me finish. It’s difficult to respond to you when you raise your voice and interrupt.”

“We’re actually saying the same thing.”
Defusion
Echo Feedback and Repeating

Firmly, calmly ask...

"Pathetic? You think I’m pathetic?"

“What did you say?”

“Can you repeat that?”

“I want to make sure I heard you correctly. Did you actually say...?”
More Defusion
*(Use Sparingly!)*

**Self-Deprecation**

Shows humility, self-reflection, openness, objectivity, and some deference, without giving your power away. (Repair attempt)

“I may be completely misinformed, but my understanding is...”

**Humor**

May defuse anger and tension (comic relief).

Use humor respectfully, when initial anger begins to subside. Laugh *with* them, not *at* them. *Never* sarcastic or teasing. Be careful it doesn’t imply lack of seriousness or concern.
“Be like water making its way through the cracks. Do not be assertive, but adjust to the object and you shall find a way around or through it. If nothing within you stays rigid, outward things will disclose themselves.”

Bruce Lee
De-escalation

Restore control

**Purpose:** Reduce anger; help the other re-establish self-control.

**Benefit:** Lower emotional tension/threat; improve judgment.

**Tactics**

1. Active listening.
2. Positive phrasing and tone.
3. Non-verbal strategies; avoid mirroring emotional posturing.
4. Slow the conversation with ‘micro-pauses’.
5. Offer a face-saving path out of full-blown conflict.
6. Offer the olive branch ("Is there anything I can do to earn your cooperation?")...model negotiation as positive conflict resolution.
Interruption
Re-direct the energy

**Purpose:** Interrupt the escalation of anger in a positive, respectful manner.

**Benefit:** Re-channel confrontation into productive conversation.

**Tactics**

1. Re-direct the other person’s attention to a more positive topic.
2. Remove the interaction to a more private setting.
3. Offer to discuss the issue after a ‘cool-down’ break.
4. Paraphrase and summarize essential points of their concerns.
5. Ask open-ended questions (who, what, where, when, how).
6. Ask them for advice. Disarm them by changing the game.
7. Give them something to think about (alternatives).
Deferral
Research the Facts

**Purpose:** Buy time to research the facts underlying the problem.

**Benefit:** Re-channel the confrontation into the promise of resolution.

**Tactics**

1. Active listening.
2. Ask open-ended questions (who, what, where, when, how).
3. Paraphrase and summarize essential points of their concerns.
4. Re-direct the other person’s attention to desired outcomes.
5. State firmly your need to suspend the conversation until you can determine the facts.
6. Signal commitment to resolution. Propose meeting later.
Disengagement
Calm Removal

**Purpose:** Choose to disengage from a potential power struggle.

**Benefit:** Calm the other person, keep your cool, de-fuse tension.

**Tactics**

1. Pause, take a deeper-than-normal breath, and release slowly.
2. Respond in a neutral, business-like, calm voice.
4. Don’t reward misbehavior with negative reaction or emotion.
5. Don’t react in a confrontational manner to ‘baiting’ remarks.
6. Calmly explain in a neutral manner why remarks are inappropriate and what potential consequences might be.
7. Firmly end the interaction. Propose meeting later. Confront in private.
**You** are in Control

**Scenario #1 – Your Mistake**
(Smoothing and Collaboration)

**Acknowledge** the problem and the feelings.

“I understand the problem. And I see that you’re upset.”

**Apologize** and take responsibility, if appropriate.

“This was clearly our mistake. Thanks for bringing it to our attention. We’ll fix this to your satisfaction and we’ll make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

**Engage** on problem solutions.

“Now, let’s look at the facts together. What solution would satisfy you the most?”
Scenario #2 – Runaway Drama
(Collaboration and Forcing)

**You are in Control**

**Acknowledge** the problem and the feelings.

“As I’ve said, I hear your point. And I understand you’re upset.”

**Acknowledge** the difference of opinion.

“But we disagree on this point.”

**Engage** on problem solutions.

“Let’s table this particular issue for now and address it later. Let’s move on. What solution would satisfy you the most?”
You are in Control

Scenario #3 – Verbal Abuse
(Withdrawal and Forcing)

**Acknowledge** the problem and the feelings.

“I understand the problem. And I see that you’re upset.”

**Terminate** the interaction.

“I want to help you resolve this problem, but you’re angry right now and I find your tone disrespectful. I’m going to excuse myself. We can talk again after you’ve calmed down.” (then leave or ask them to leave)

**Set conditions** for re-engagement.

“I’ll call you tomorrow to arrange a meeting so we can continue this discussion. I will invite your boss and mine to the meeting (optional).”
You Have Recourse

1. Attempt to informally resolve your differences directly with the other person.

2. Talk to a trusted friend or colleague, your boss, or your mentor for advice and counsel.

3. Talk to the other person’s boss to report and document the problem. Let the other person know in advance.

4. Consult Human Resources.

5. If attempts at informal resolution fail, and the behavior persists, file a formal complaint.
“It’s not the load that breaks you down. It’s the way you carry it.”

Lena Horne
# Personal Accountability

## Your Behavior in Conflict Situations

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<th>Grade Yourself (A - F)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separating the person from the behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfort with silence in tense situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding the Triangle (<em>Victim-Persecutor-Rescuer</em>).</td>
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<td>Use of active listening skills.</td>
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<td>Using <em>“I”</em> statements vs. <em>“You”</em> statements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being clear, succinct, and specific with language.</td>
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<td>Firm and assertive, without being combative.</td>
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<td>Being respectful when confronted.</td>
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<td>Remaining calm and composed when angry.</td>
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<td>Self-awareness of personal ‘triggers’ and fears.</td>
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<td>Use of self-deprecation and humor.</td>
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<td>Not taking criticism personally.</td>
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<td>Not rushing to agree and appease.</td>
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History starts now.

"Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past."

Lily Tomlin
Negotiating

“it’s not enough that we succeed. cats must also fail.”
Checklist for Preparation

1. What are your interests (goals)? Theirs?
2. What is your BATNA*? What is theirs?
3. How important is the relationship?
4. What information do you need to share? Obtain?
5. What concessions are you willing to make?
6. What external influences could affect the negotiation?
7. What will you accept? (Must-haves vs Nice-to-haves)
8. What assumptions are you making? How to check them?
9. Are you emotionally neutral or too invested?
10. What is your level of authority or decision making power?

*Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (walk-away position).
# Preparation: Currency Analysis

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