

Mastering the Art of Difficult Personalities: “Navigating the People Puzzle”

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TEXAS ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES
RISK MANAGEMENT POOL

Objectives



Define

Define different types of difficult behavior.

Develop

Develop effective strategies for working with difficult people.

Discuss

Discuss the supervisor's role in managing difficult employees.



What is a difficult person?

People that demonstrate the following characteristics can be viewed as difficult:

- **Aggression:** hostile or violent behavior or attitudes toward another; readiness to attack or confront.
- **Passive Aggressive:** a pattern of indirectly expressing negative feelings instead of openly addressing them.
- **Negativity:** a pattern of indirectly expressing negative feelings instead of openly addressing them.
- **Manipulation:** the action of manipulating someone in a clever or unscrupulous way.



The Know-It-Alls



The Passives



The Dictators



The "Yes" People



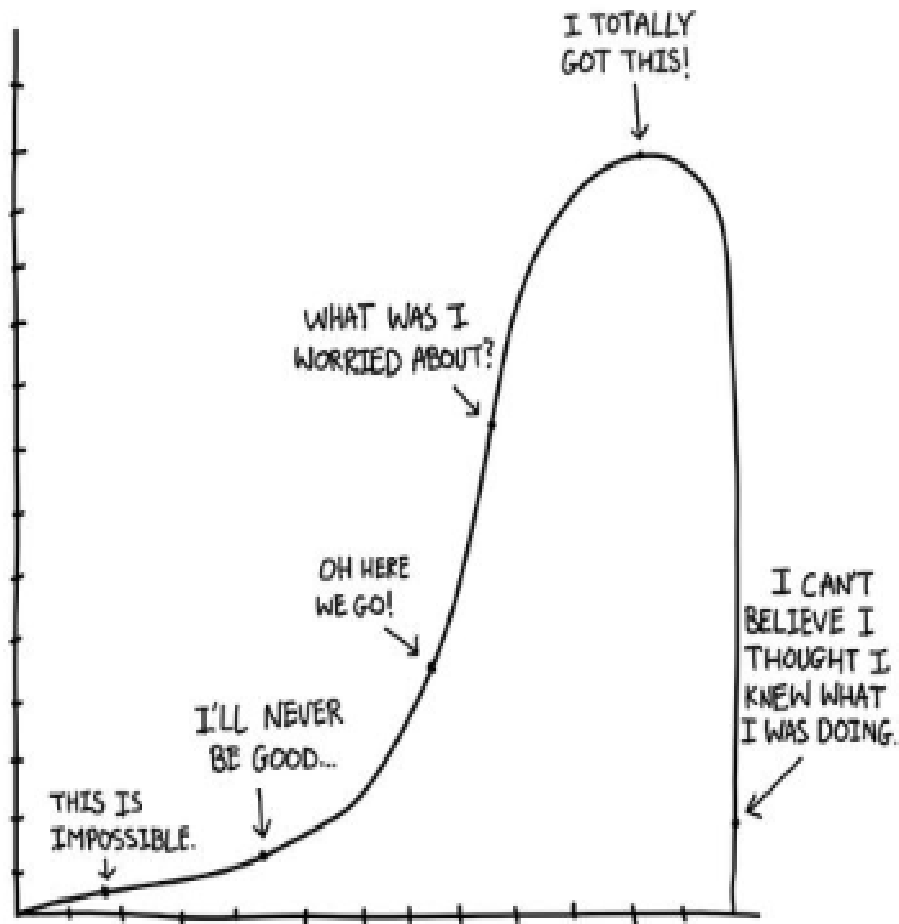
The "No" People



The Gripers



LEARNING CURVE



Causes of Difficult Behavior

Understanding the root cause of difficult behavior will better help you respond more effectively.

- Stress
- Insecurity
- Lack of Communication Skills
- Personalities

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Characteristics of Difficult People

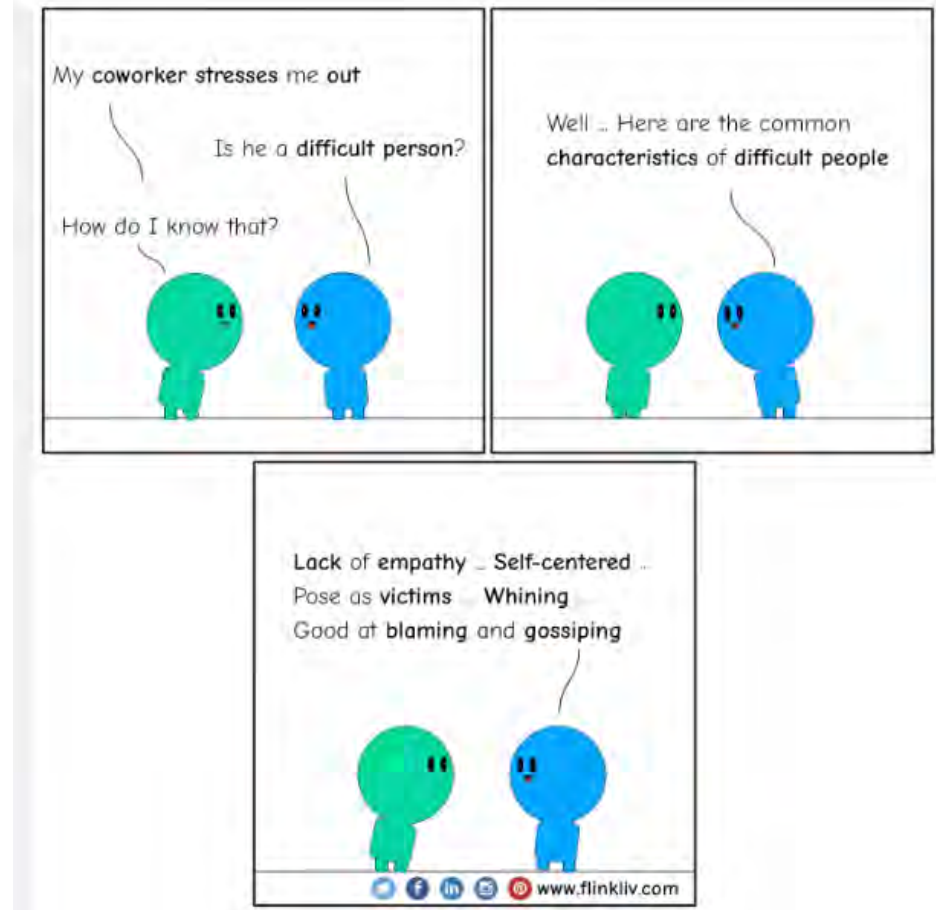


- Attitude – eye roller, drawer slammer, walking out
- Attendance- beware FMLA
- Anger, whiner
- Performance Problems – expectations, skills, conflict
- Performance Problems – health, family, childcare



Characteristics of Difficult People

- Entitled
- Bullies
- Gossipers/Rumor mongers
- Victims/Not my fault
- Overly sensitive



Communication Strategies

Effective Communication

Active listening

Asking open-ended questions

These strategies can help build rapport and defuse potentially contentious situations.

Nonverbal Communication

Body language

Tone of voice

Facial expressions



Scenario

You are a supervisor in the Tax Office, and one of your employees, John, has been consistently causing issues with customers. He has been rude, unresponsive, and fails to meet customer expectations. It's time to address this issue and find a resolution that improves John's behavior and ensures customer satisfaction.

What action would you take as a supervisor?



Tips and Strategies

DO

- Use language and tone that is calming to discuss difficult behavior – be direct.
 - Example: I've noticed you have been late to work these past few days, what can be changed to help you get here on time?
- Offer VALID suggestions; keep outcome in mind.
- Avoid criticizing or judging – do not use the “blame game.”



Tips and Strategies

DO

- Stay focused on the subject at hand.
- Be firm; use statements.
 - Example: You've missed three important deadlines. Please explain why this is happening.
- Listen and be prepared to negotiate.
- State how you can help the employee.
- Make short term agreements and follow up.
- Acknowledge small improvements on the way.



Tips and Strategies

DON'T

- Put a negative spin on everything.
- Allow employees to erode your office climate.
- Allow employees to create a hostile environment.
- Allow arguments or unproductive behavior.
- Ignore policies and rules.
- Allow gossip.
- Make people look bad in public.



Tips and Strategies

- Do not ignore problem employees.
- Learn techniques to address difficult employees – focus on “good behaviors” not “negative behaviors.”
- Ask open ended questions to get answers – let them talk.
- Do not label employees as “difficult” because they make a complaint – it may be VALID.
- Avoid personal criticism – focus on work.



Why is Discipline Important?



is to salvage, not punish,
the employee



Create a Positive Environment

A great work environment takes work!

- Start from day one – effective orientation program
- Recognize performance problems early and address timely
- Reward good performance and behavior you want continued – **Praise Often**
- Could it be YOU?



Liability the “L” word

**Supervisors must
comply with all
legislation:
Federal-State-Local**

**County needs
compliant policies**

**Supervisors must
treat all employees
equally and fairly**

**Supervisors must have
SPECIFIC and VALID
work-related reasons
for all actions**

**Supervisors must
document
everything**



Disciplinary Ground Rules

- Maintain At-Will Employment – Do not surrender it in words or policies
- Follow progressive discipline when practical
- Last action for termination is what you must defend in unemployment or EEOC
- Always prohibit and investigate claims of discrimination or harassment
- Distribute and follow all written policies and procedures



Before You Act

- Give all employees a fair hearing.
- Investigate or follow up where necessary.
- Follow procedures carefully in investigating potential legal violations (harassment, discrimination, safety, wage and hour, etc.)
- Determine if you are being too difficult or unfair.
- Evaluate policies and procedures from all perspectives.
- Advise the employee on seriousness of issue.



Types of Discipline

Preventative
Discipline

Done without employee
knowledge

Corrective
Discipline

After behavior or poor
performance has occurred

Punitive
Discipline

After behavior— job in
jeopardy



How to Discipline

Preventative

- New employee orientations
- Constructive Feedback
- Lead by example



How to Discipline

Corrective

- Verbal
- Performance Improvement Plan
- Written warning for misconduct



How to Discipline

Punitive Discipline

- Occurs after behavior or action takes place.
- Must be written.
- Must be formal consultation with employee.
- Provide provable facts only.
- No personal biases, opinions or feelings.
- Must have a plan of correction.
- Employee knows their job is in jeopardy.



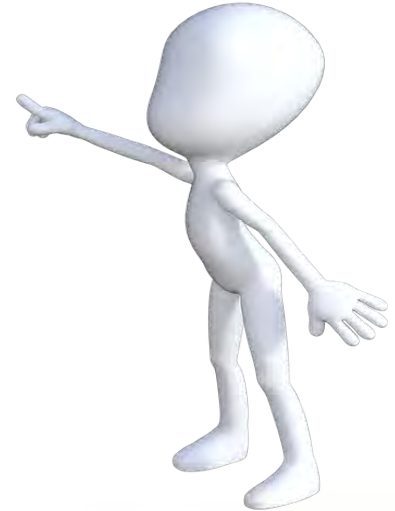
Tips on Documenting

- State specifics like “argues with other co-workers” or “makes inappropriate jokes”.
- Avoid subjective phrases that are vague or could be misinterpreted – these are indefensible.
 - Don’t use phrases like:
 - ✓ maintain a positive attitude
 - ✓ be a team player
 - ✓ need interpersonal skills



Avoid These Qualities

- Loves rumors, tattlers and suck ups.
- Failing to communicate clearly.
- Speaking loudly, rude, mean.
- Using discipline inappropriately.



Create a Positive Environment

A great work environment takes work!

- Start from day one – effective orientation program.
- Recognize performance problems early and immediately deal with them.
- Reward good performance and behavior you want continued – Praise Often.
- Could it be YOU?



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