

# The 10-Step Program for Dealing with Difficult People



## Dealing with Difficult People

**Step 1: Stop thinking and start listening ... truly listen.** Don't judge others mentally or think about what you will say ahead of time. Don't interrupt – as long as they are in control, allow them to express their frustrations. Identify what they are upset about and repeat it back to ensure you understand.

**Step 2: See it from their perspective.** Identify their feelings – are they angry, frustrated, worried, impatient, or undecided? Don't make assumptions about why others are acting the way they are at the moment. You don't know what else may have happened to them before you started dealing with them; deal with the situation as it is right now.

**Step 3: Acknowledge their point or their feelings.** If there has been an error, admit it up front or acknowledge that you see their point of view. State clearly and sincerely that you regret the error ... or that you are sorry they are upset.

**Step 4: Ask, "What can I do?"** See what it is that they want. This indicates that you take responsibility for helping, and it helps move others into a problem-solving mode. Position the situation as you and them against the problem.

**Step 5: Maintain interest and concern.** Show respect and understanding through your nonverbals and actions – often that's all that people want. Use phrases like, "I understand ..." and "I appreciate how you feel ..." Provide eye contact and nod to show you understand and that you are paying attention.

**Step 6: Make it right.** Tell them what you *can* do. If possible, offer choices – this gives a sense of empowerment. If you can't solve the problem, get someone who can. Don't make promises you can't keep. Get agreement on a solution, and make sure to document it.

**Step 7: Take it further.** Find something extra or unexpected you can offer. Maybe it's just a written apology ... but do something beyond what is expected.

**Step 8: Seek solutions.** When dealing with chronic complainers, ask what would solve the problem or say, "If I *do this*, would that resolve this situation?" If they complain in front of others, ask the others if they feel the same way – get some peer pressure working against the complainers!

**Step 9: Stay objective and neutral.** Let abusive or aggressive people vent. Describe the situation – don't blame – and try to remain open to solving the problem.

**Step 10: Refuse to be treated poorly.** Let people know that out-of-control behavior is an obstacle to finding a solution. Insist that they respect you and you will, in turn, do the same. If needed, excuse yourself and walk away.

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