

Top 5 Reasons Why Some People I Work With Are So Difficult

Teamwork

Whenever I speak in workplaces about difficult managers and co-workers, there is always one question that always comes up... 'How do we get rid of them?' But I think a more important question to ask is, 'Why are they so difficult?'

If you have the belief that the answer to that question is that they are ... "100% pure evil!" "They cannot help it" or "They are beyond help", it will certainly affect the way you interact with that person and possibly make a bad situation much, much worse.

Here are my top five, less-sinister explanations for difficult people at work. Although these explanations do not excuse their behaviour, they certainly can help you see their behaviour in a kinder light and respond in a more helpful way, as a result.

Forgiveness is a funny thing. It warms the heart and cools the sting.

The first is that they may well be going through personal problems at home. If people are unhappy at home, they tend to be unhappy at work. Perhaps they have serious health concerns, are going through relationship difficulties or have been living their life out-of-balance for too long.

Peter Allen

I have known many people who have shown genuine care for a challenging co-worker, asking how they are really going, and sometimes that person has burst into tears. At the very least it will prompt that person to think about how they are coming across.

Number two on my list is that they simply may be doing the best they know how. Most leaders, for example, tend to learn their people management skills the hard way, through their mistakes. Of course the smarter way to learn is through other people's experience, so often these people benefit from a good mentoring relationship or being given relevant training opportunities.

The third reason is unclear expectations. Perhaps some team members, for example, have not been given clear expectations from their manager about how challenges are to be dealt with. But it is also important for team members to respectfully communicate their expectations to their leader about what they need from them.

Number four on my list is that the person concerned simply is not a good fit for the position they are in. This conclusion will often be reached when the above explanations have been addressed or discounted. Here the discussion is more around which roles would be a better fit for their strengths than engaging in a blame exercise.

The fifth reason our team members are difficult is often due to the fact that we ourselves are contributing! We are not always doing so intentionally. But often our way of coping - such as withdrawing from a difficult co-worker or confiding at length with our friends at work - is contributing to the tensions. Often the way we speak to that person is also pushing their buttons. Most of us have sensitivities of one sort or another, but there are three in particular that are most common - disrespect, control and abandonment.

We can of course send that person off to therapy and tell them to sort themselves out, but I think we are better to adjust ourselves in the hope that if we change, they will as well. Although this does not come with a guarantee, I can only promise that if no-one changes, the same dynamics are likely to continue and probably worsen.

Key points

We never quite know what is going on in somebody else's life - a colleague may be dealing with challenges in other aspects of their life.

Considering why they are so difficult can change our attitude to them.

They may be doing the best they can.

Unclear expectations may be contributing to the problem.

The person may not be a good fit for their role.

We may be contributing through our own behaviour.



Ken Warren BA, M Soc Sc, CSP

www.positivepeoplesolutions.com.au

Ken Warren BA, M Soc Sc, CSP is a Relationships Specialist who helps teams to perform at their very best. Through his enjoyable and interactive training programs, Ken helps schools around Australia to build even stronger, more positive and effective teams; handle difficult conversations well with parents and colleagues; and enhance their resilience and well-being. Find out more at www.positivepeoplesolutions.com.au