

## Skills 360 – Dealing with Problem People (Part 1)

### Discussion Questions

1. What types of people do you find difficult to deal with at work?
2. How do you usually deal with people who are rude or uncooperative?
3. Have you ever wanted to change jobs because of someone you didn't get along with?

### Vocabulary

**To feel refreshed:** if you feel refreshed, you feel more comfortable or energetic after resting or taking a break; "After a week on the beach in Mexico, I felt very refreshed and returned to work happy."

**To wipe off:** to remove or take away, especially from a surface; "After finishing his presentation, Grant wiped off the whiteboard and gathered his papers."

**Confrontational:** if a person is confrontational, he or she seems to always want to argue or fight; "Management found it difficult to deal with the union lawyers, who were extremely confrontational at every meeting."

**Just plain:** simply, or we can say "just plain" before an adjective to make it stronger; "I'm sorry to say John, but I think your idea for the new ad is just plain silly."

**A pain in the butt:** something or someone that bothers, angers, or annoys you; "Doing inventory is important, but it's a real pain in the butt to have to do it every week."

**To test someone's patience:** if someone or something tests your patience, it bothers you so much that it's difficult not to become upset or frustrated; "Customers who don't know what they want can really test a salesperson's patience."

**To push someone's buttons:** to make someone angry or irritated, especially by repeatedly doing or saying something; "Ron really pushes my buttons with his non-stop questioning of every aspect of every project."

**To stick to:** to continue to do something or follow a certain way; "The company asks all employees to stick to regular rules of etiquette in email communication."

**In a bad mood:** not feeling happy or pleasant; "Todd was in such a bad mood this morning, he yelled at his assistant just for smiling too much."

**In someone's presence:** in the same place as someone; "The lawyer asked me to visit his office so I could sign the documents in his presence."

**Insecurity:** a feeling of not being good enough or not being confident; "Wanda's feels a lot of insecurity about her skills as a salesperson, which really doesn't help her."

**Counterproductive:** going against an objective or purpose, rather than helping; "Our daily project meetings became counterproductive when nobody could agree on anything."

**First and foremost:** we say "first and foremost" to introduce our most important idea first; "First and foremost, what we need to do today is find a way to increase revenues."

**Cool, calm, and collected:** relaxed, unworried, and confident; "The company representative remained calm, cool, and collected throughout the difficult television interview."

**Rational:** sensible and thoughtful, rather than emotional; "It's important for a small business person to be very rational about major spending decisions."

**To bait someone:** to try to make someone angry or start an argument; "Lou was just trying to bait me when he said that New Yorkers are too rude to work in PR."

**To take the high road:** to do what is right, especially in response to something that is wrong; "A good manager learns to take the high road when employees argue about trivial matters."

**To stoop to someone's level:** to act poorly or immaturely when others do; "When everyone started shouting insults at the meeting, I refused to stoop to their level and simply walked out."

**To defuse:** to make a situation less tense, dangerous, or stressful; "When negotiations became heated, the mediator tried to defuse the situation by calling for a break."

**Not so hot:** not so good; "Spencer, if you're really not feeling so hot, you should just go home to bed rather than getting everyone in the office sick."

**To infer:** to understand, conclude, or think something based on information or evidence; "A few analysts inferred from the CEO's speech that the company was going to make some major personnel changes."

**To overinterpret:** to make too many assumptions based on what someone says or does; "Investors often overinterpret small changes in a company out of fear of losing money."

**To give someone the floor:** to allow someone to speak in a group setting; "A good facilitator will give the floor to each and every person at some point in a meeting."

**To turn a corner:** to make an important personal change; "Brad didn't seem to care about his job, but he recently turned a corner and is impressing everyone."

**Disruptive:** someone or something that is "disruptive" causes problems and interrupts or prevents something from happening; "Most public speakers consider the ringing of cell phones to be highly disruptive."

**Can't stand:** strongly dislike or hate; "The customer survey revealed that most people can't stand calls from telephone solicitors."

## Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast! I'm Tim Simmons, and I'm looking forward to an especially exciting year of podcasts. There's lots of great stuff in the works for 2012, so stay tuned.

Now, the New Year is a really important time for most people. For one thing, we use it as a time for setting goals. And if you want some help doing that, be sure to check out the Skills 360 podcast on 'achieving your goals'. The New Year is also a time when we feel **refreshed** and optimistic about the future. It's a brand new start, right? Well, unfortunately, that feeling is not shared by everyone. You might go to the office in the New Year with a smile on your face, but there are people who seem determined to **wipe it off**. I'm talking about problem people.

Every office has them. They might be uncooperative, rude, **confrontational**, overly competitive, or **just plain** unpleasant. Whatever the case, they're a **pain in the butt** to deal with. These problem people **test our patience** and **push our buttons**. But they don't have to. You just need to **stick to** a few basic principles and you'll have better success in dealing with these situations.

Today I want to talk about how to deal with specific incidents with these difficult people. Maybe you're in a meeting and someone is screaming and shouting at everyone and everything. Or maybe a grouchy colleague walks up to your desk and wants to start an argument. Or maybe someone on your project team is in a really **bad mood**. These are the kinds of incidents I'm talking about.

So how do we deal with them? Firstly, try not to judge the person. Don't assume you know what's going on. The *source* of the person's behavior might be completely unrelated to you or work. It might simply be coming out **in your presence**. The other thing you need to realize is that difficult people are often difficult because of **insecurity** or fear. For both of these reasons, reacting in ways that *increase* anxiety are going to be **counterproductive**. Instead, you need to find ways to *decrease* anxiety.

This means, **first and foremost**, remaining **cool, calm and collected**. Stay **rational** rather than becoming emotional. Even if the person seems to be **baiting** you, try not to get involved in an argument. **Take the high road** and, even if the person is getting personal, don't **stoop to their level**. In many cases, remaining calm and refusing to involve yourself in an argument can **defuse** the situation relatively quickly. So, if someone says to you "Hey Jack, your idea stinks. That would never work in a million years," resist the temptation to strike back with, "Yeah, well your idea **isn't so hot** either."

If the person persists, one technique you can use is to repeat back what he or she is saying. Like this: "So, you think my idea stinks and it would never work?" Or you can rephrase it, like this: "So, you think my idea is terrible and I don't know what I'm talking about?" Just be careful not to **infer** too much. You might cause a bigger argument if you **overinterpret** what someone says. But if you repeat back the basic idea or words, sometimes people will realize what they've just said and how it must sound.

Now, sometimes people cause problems because they don't feel understood. A solution for that is very simple: *listen*. Hear what the person has to say, invite him to explain more, and ask questions about his opinion. Just remember to focus on the ideas, not the personal attacks or issues. If you **give** a difficult person **the floor**, rather than taking it away from him, you will sometimes see him **turn a corner** and become more positive.

And let's not forget some direct techniques. In some circumstances, you can simply tell someone directly that his behavior is **disruptive** or disrespectful and ask him very kindly to change. Remember to focus on *behavior*, not *character*. It's okay to say, "Brad, everyone would feel more comfortable if you would lower your voice and focus on the task at hand." That's much better than saying "Brad, you're a terrible grouch and we **can't stand** being around you," even if that's what you really want to say.

Great. So remember to **keep your cool**, to listen and understand as well as possible, and to show or tell someone the effects of their behavior. If you follow these principles, you'll have much better success with those difficult people.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the **[myBEonline.com](http://myBEonline.com)** website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

Next week, we'll look at ongoing long-term problems with difficult people. You may not be able to change them as people, but you may be able to change the way they act.

So long. And see you again soon.

## Review

1. What is Tim's focus in this talk?
  - A ongoing troubles with difficult co-workers
  - B specific incidents with problem people
  - C problematic relationships with bosses
  - D different types of co-workers
  
2. What does Tim say about the *reason* a person is being difficult?
  - A It is usually related to general job dissatisfaction.
  - B It is impossible to know.
  - C It is not relevant.
  - D It may have nothing to do with you or work.
  
3. What would Tim think is the worst response to a co-worker's criticism of your fashion sense?
  - A Well, I don't have much time to think about clothing.
  - B I guess you're entitled to your opinion.
  - C I don't think you're going to win any fashion awards today either.
  - D I'm sorry, but I'm too busy for chit chat.
  
4. What does Tim recommend doing with people who feel they are not understood?
  - A listening
  - B criticizing
  - C reporting
  - D ignoring
  
5. When asking people to change their behavior, you should focus on their \_\_\_\_\_, not their \_\_\_\_\_.
  
6. Which of the following does Tim recommend doing when dealing with difficult people at work? [Select all that apply]
  - A repeating what they have said
  - B responding in the same way they have spoken
  - C directly but gently asking the person to change
  - D threatening to inform a supervisor
  - E asking another co-worker to mediate
  - F remaining logical and calm
  - G giving the person a chance to speak
  - H asking the person whether he or she has personal problems

## Review Answers

1. What is Tim's focus in this talk?

**B specific incidents with problem people**

2. What does Tim say about the *reason* a person is being difficult?

**D It may have nothing to do with you or work.**

3. What would Tim think is the *worst* response to a co-worker's criticism of your fashion sense?

**C I don't think you're going to win any fashion awards today either.**

4. What does Tim recommend doing with people who feel they are not understood?

**A listening**

5. When asking people to change their behavior, you should focus on their **behavior** not their **character**.

6. Which of the following does Tim recommend doing when dealing with difficult people at work? [choose all that apply]

**A repeating what they have said**

**C directly but gently asking the person to change**

**F remaining logical and calm**

**G giving the person a chance to speak**

## Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

