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Introduction

This workbook is a companion piece to our “Dealing with Difficult People” guide.

While it does not follow the guide by the letter, it does fit perfectly with it. The workbook will certainly be easier to use if you have read the guide first.

The objective here is to guide you through the process of recognising the types of difficult people and related scenarios, and selecting effective strategies to resolve the issues for the benefit of all involved. Sounds like a grand mission? You bet! But you can be sure that this is an absolutely valuable and essential skill.

To enjoy the greatest benefits from this workbook, please work through the sections with your personal experiences in mind. You might have encountered more of some types of difficult people than others. Aim to strengthen existing skills and learn new ones.

You will then be able to confidently breeze through home and work life, handling every people issue with ease. The benefits to your business success and happiness level will be priceless!

*“When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudice, and motivated by pride and vanity”
- Dale Carnegie*

Who's who – identifying the types

10 major types of difficult people were described in the guide. Do you remember their main characteristics? Try matching the personality types on the left to the characteristics description on the right. The first one is done, for your reference.

Types of difficult people	Answers	Characteristics
The Big Bully	4	1. This person has the answer to any problem, even if he does not fully understand the question. He does not care about the opinion of others.
The Ambush Artist		2. This person likes to appear from behind your back suddenly to attack your work.
The Volatile Volumizer		3. This person does not respond much to any conversation; it's almost like talking to a wall.
The Know it all Non-Listener		4. This person barks orders, criticises, and accuses.
The Wishy Washy One		5. You get an earful from this person about how everything is not right, according to his expectation.
The Yes Me to Death Fraud		6. This person's pessimistic outlook makes it impossible to accomplish any project.
The Think They Know but Don'ts		7. This person is un-decisive and has no firm direction.
The Deep, Deep Freeze		8. This person blows situations out of proportion with hostility.
The No, Not, Never Person		9. Do not be fooled by this person. His knowledge is more superficial than he cares to admit.
The Complaint Central Person		10. This person has a very nice personality but tends to over-commit and often unable to deliver on promises made.

Who's who – identifying the types-answers

Types of difficult people	Answer	Characteristics
The Big Bully	4	1. This person has the answer to any problem, even if he does not fully understand the question. He does not care about the opinion of others.
The Ambush Artist	2	2. This person likes to appear from behind your back suddenly to attack your work.
The Volatile Volumizer	8	3. This person does not respond much to any conversation; it's almost like talking to a wall.
The Know it all Non-Listener	1	4. This person barks orders, criticises, and accuses.
The Wishy Washy One	7	5. You get an earful from this person about how everything is not right, according to his expectation.
The Yes Me to Death Fraud	10	6. This person's pessimistic outlook makes it impossible to accomplish any project.
The Think They Know but Don'ts	9	7. This person is un-decisive and has no firm direction.
The Deep, Deep Freeze	3	8. This person blows situations out of proportion with hostility.
The No, Not, Never Person	6	9. Do not be fooled by this person. His knowledge is more superficial than he cares to admit.
The Complaint Central Person	5	10. This person has a very nice personality but tends to over-commit and often unable to deliver on promises made.

Who said that?

Now that you have an idea of the major types of difficult peoples and their characteristics, let's see if you can readily identify them when you hear them speak. Once you know who you are dealing with, you will have a better chance of deploying the right solutions.

Here's a scene from a meeting discussing the Year End office party plan. The chairman, being a diplomatic leader, asks everyone around the table to voice his suggestions.

Here's how it goes. Listen to what is being said, and see if you can identify the type of difficult person making each statement.

1. **Person A:** Of course we should have our Year End dinner at the Beach Front Hotel. Any other choice would be a disaster. Who suggested the dreadful place we went to last year? Should have asked me! So listen to me this time, everyone.

Reaction from group: Must he always have his way?

This person could be _____

2. **Person B:** But did you have the facts? The Beach Front Hotel is way out for everyone in the company. 9 out of 10 persons here live in or near the city, and to venture out to the Beach Front Hotel 70 km from where most of us live will be a huge inconvenience.

Reaction from group: He thinks he knows his stuff, but the statistics are all made up!

This person could be _____

3. **Person C:** There are so many nice places for Year End parties. The city is convenient and the atmosphere is vibrant. The beach is exotic and beautiful. City venues will be more expensive, but the standard of food will be high. The beach venue will certainly be better value for money, and we get some home cooked goodies....

Reaction from the group: Oh no... we don't have all day to listen to his pros and cons... will he ever decide?

This person could be _____

4. **Person D:** Whichever venue you choose, let me take care of the bookings. And while I am at it, I will negotiate the food and wine list, and take care of special door gifts for everyone! Oh I just love organizing events....

Reaction from the group: Oh no... that's what he said last year too! And we ended up having to order from Pizza Hut and KFC. He just loves to look helpful it but could never deliver it

This person could be _____

5. **Person E:** Whatever

Reaction from the group: We really don't know what he's thinking.....

This person could be _____

6. **Person F:** Before we proceed with the Event organisation, could the Chairman please present the budget statement for this? I don't believe we should proceed without knowing if we have the funds for it.

Reaction from group: Trust him to challenge any project with a sudden twist....

This person could be _____

7. **Person G:** The venue this year had better be at a convenient location, with clear direction. Last year I did not receive any detailed information and wasted 1 hour looking for the car park....

Reaction from the group: Oh, please stop complaining about what happened last year. It was over. We are tired of hearing it for the 20th time.

This person could be _____

8. **Person H:** Is it time for the Year End party again? Oh time flies. Do we really have to do this every year? It costs quite a lot of money, and frankly, I do not see what it has achieved....

Reaction from group: Oh come on, loosen up. You will enjoy the party if you are not so negative about it.

This person could be _____

9. **Person I:** Don't get me started on this. Why do you always have Year End events so close to the Year End, when I am usually away travelling? I have missed every single event so far. I just feel so left out! Are you sincere about including everyone in this? Otherwise I am out of here!

Reaction from the group: Trust him to blow things out of proportion. He thinks we are all out against him!

This person could be _____

10. **Person J:** I have been managing events for years, and have no doubt that the city venue would be the most cost effective. Since the venue is near our office, we can walk over after work. That will save many hours in productivity and it is certainly in line with Human Resources policy

.....

Reaction from the group: Is he aware that this is the Year End Party we are talking about, and not the annual business conference?

This person could be _____

Note: refer to the following categories of difficult people for the answers above. Answers can be found in the section 'Taking Suitable Actions'.

Use the following categories for your answers above.

Type of difficult persons:

The Big Bully

The Ambush Artist

The Volatile Volumizer

The Know it all Non-Listener

The Wishy Washy One

The Yes Me to Death Fraud

The Think They Know but Don'ts

The Deep, Deep Freeze

The No, Not, Never Person

The Complaint Central Person

Notes of caution:

1. There is no absolute right or wrong way of categorizing a person's behaviour. Everyone has some traits of each type of behaviour, which will surface under different circumstances. Listen carefully with an open mind.
2. Categorizing people in this way helps us make sense of the situation quickly, so that we have some idea of how to approach the situation for amicable outcomes. It is not meant to be a judgement against others nor a prescription for a specific course of action. The suitable solution depends on our understanding of the situation and persons involved.

"Dwelling on the negative simply contributes to its power."

Shirley MacLaine

What are the driving forces?

Hope you had some fun identifying who made those statements. Did they sound familiar to you? You had probably encountered people like these in your life.

Before we think about suitable solutions to overcome the difficulties of dealing with these persons, we need to understand the reasons behind these behaviours.

In the guide book, Dr Rick Brinkman and Dr Rick Kirschner were cited as suggesting that **intent is the root of behaviour**.

There are four types of intent: Getting it done, Getting it right, Getting along, Getting appreciation.

One key skill to have is the observation of communication styles, especially the extent of task / people focus the person has.

Task focused	People focused
Get it done (want things my way) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The big bully• The Ambush Artist• The Know it all Non-Listener	Get along (approval seeking) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wishy Washy Ones• Yes Me to Death Fraud
Get it right (perfectionist) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deep Deep Freeze• The No, Not, Never Person• The Complaint Central	Get appreciated (elaborate style that calls attention to himself) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volatile Volumizer• Think They Know It All

Problems arise when people with different communication styles or intent are working together.

Points to ponder:

1. What will it take for the 'Get it done' person to feel threatened and difficult?

2. What is the 'get it right' person most afraid of?
3. What happens when you ask the 'Get along' person to help with a task? Will it get done easily? Why?
4. What happens when you ignore the 'Get appreciated' person?
5. Triggers

Some events trigger off difficult behaviour in most persons, while other events are more specific to certain types of people.

 - a. Can you think of a few events that tend to bring out the worst in most people? These are the behaviours that we need to avoid at all cost. (For example, being rude, being late without reason, demanding impossible deadlines etc.).
 - b. Can you think of events and circumstances that tend to trigger off difficult behaviour in some people around you? (For example, hunger, tiredness, illness, in a rush, financial difficulties, cultural differences, different moral values etc.)

Be sure to be communicative or sensitive about special triggers as they provide an explanation and therefore possible solutions in dealing with the difficult people you encounter.

Flex your people skills muscles

No, I don't mean flexing muscles to get into a fight with your difficult people. There is no one-off solution when it comes to dealing with difficult people. It is an iterative process. We need to exercise this 'people skills' muscle constantly, keeping it strong and effective all the time.

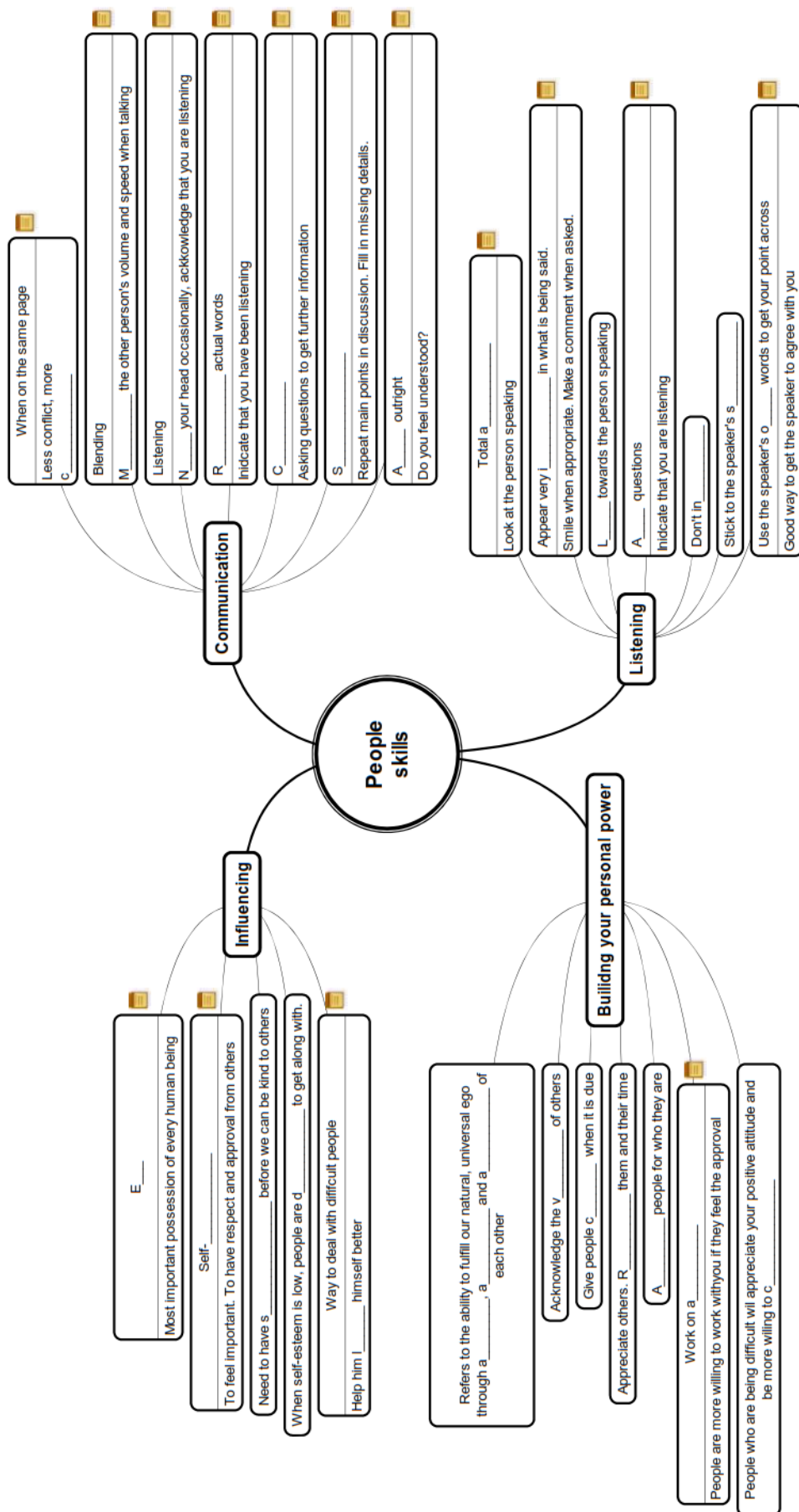
This section revisits the foundation covered in the guide. The ideas are presented in a mindmap, with some keywords that you will need to fill in, so as to reinforce your ideas.

The concepts presented will work well to improve situations when people are being difficult.

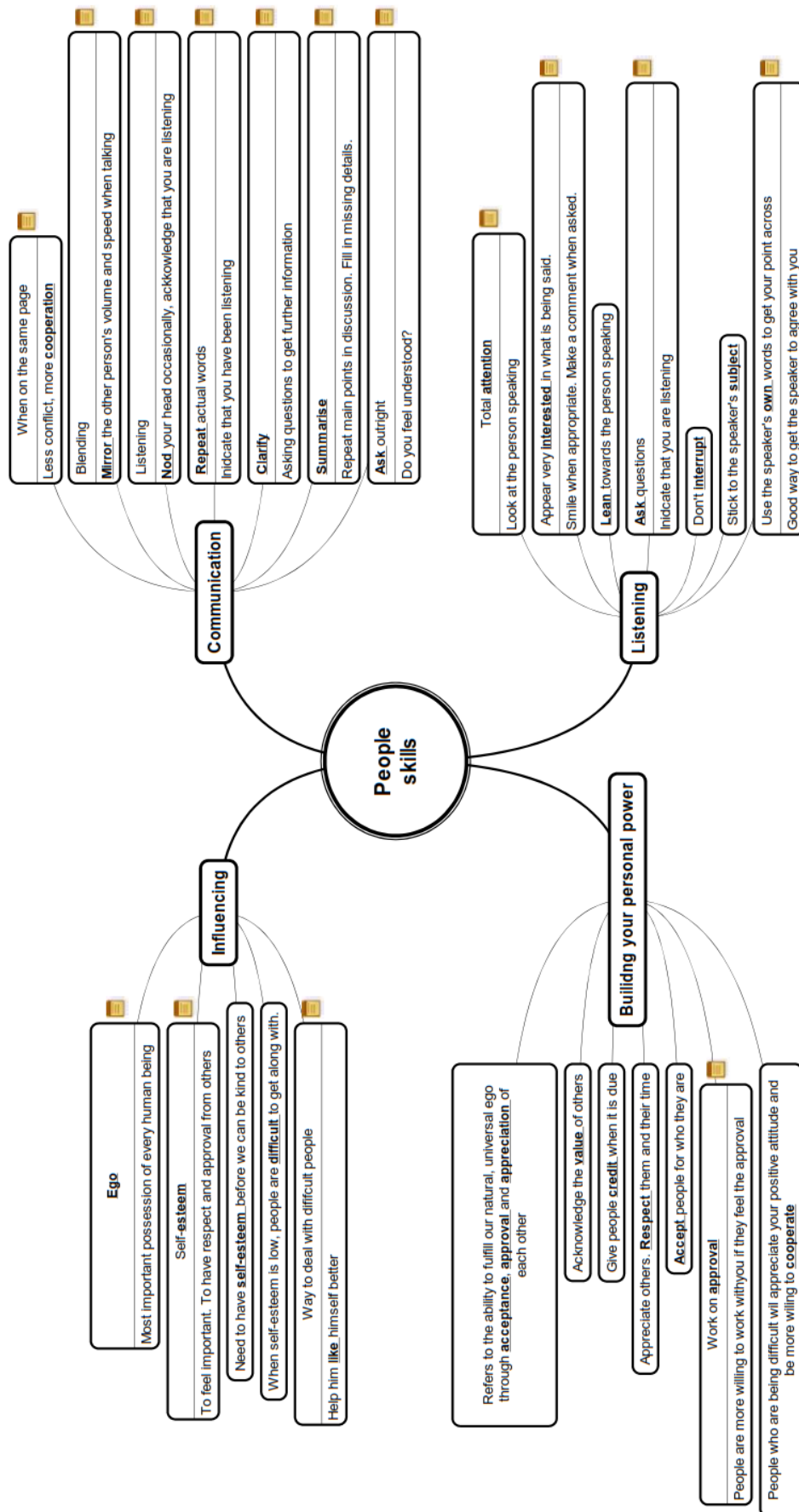
Zoom in if you can't make out the words.

"Difficult People are your key to self-empowerment, you need to learn how to cope with them, not let them dominate and affect you."

Janice Davies



Flex your people skills muscles-answers



Taking suitable actions

The best way to learn how to handle real situations is to practise doing **role play**.

Each of the conversation examples in section '**Who said that**' can be used for role play. The statements made by each 'difficult person' and the impact it had on the audience are listed here to set the scene for role play.

Find a partner to practise the following conversations with you. Do not rush through all the scenarios or you will be very worn out and confused. **Focus** on a couple of cases each session. Create or re-enact similar situations and practise the actions that you will take, till you feel comfortable doing it.

Record your response and your practise partner's observations so that you can continue to improve.

Case 1 – The Big Bully

Characteristics:

- Driven to get things done
- Not personal
- Difficult behaviour triggered by: feeling thwarted in accomplishing something.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Do not counterattack
- Does not need to justify your position at this moment.
- Do not just shutdown; be assertive.
- Hold your ground. He will respect you for it.
- Repeat his name to get his attention.
- Make it known that you understand his complaint, and answer the complaint with a clear, brief explanation.

- Let him know that you are open to further discussion when he is able to speak to you with respect.

Challenge Statement

Of course we should have our Year End dinner at the Beach Front Hotel. Any other choice would be a disaster. Who suggested the dreadful place we went to last year? Should have asked me! So listen to me this time, everyone.

Reaction from group: Must he always have his way?

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Case 2 – The Ambush Artist

Characteristics:

- A backstabber when he feels threatened or left out.
- You might not even know it is happening

Hints for handling the situation:

- Determine if he is just attention-getting or has a more serious motive.
- Do not strike back or run away.
- Do not show emotional reaction. That takes the fun away for the Ambush Artist.
- Handle the situation directly and assertively. Ask direct questions to bring the issue to the open.
- Be matter-of-fact but firm. Hold your ground.

Challenge Statement

Before we proceed with the Event organisation, could the Chairman please present the budget statement for this? I don't believe we should proceed without knowing if we have the funds for it.

Reaction from group: Trust him to challenge any project with a sudden twist....

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

"A simple rule in dealing with those who are hard to get along with is to remember that this person is striving to assert his superiority; and you must deal with him from that point of view"

Alfred Adler

Case 3 – The Volatile Volumizer

Characteristics:

- An exploder who frightens others or cause them to retaliate.
- Uncomfortable with his behaviour but unable to control himself.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Get some emotional distance
- Take control of the situation
- Take time out if necessary to calm down
- Be friendly and calm
- Say his name to get his attention
- Address his concerns clearly and quickly
- Try to discover the trigger for the behaviour so that future outbursts can be prevented or minimised.

Challenge statement

Don't get me started on this. Why do you always have Year End events so close to the Year End, when I am usually away travelling? I have missed every single event so far. I just feel so left out! Are you sincere about including everyone in this? Otherwise I am out of here!

Reaction from the group: Trust him to blow things out of proportion. He thinks we are all out against him!

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Case 4 – Know-it-all non-listener

Characteristics:

- An expert or very knowledgeable in her field.
- Assertive and outspoken.
- Grown used to basking in her expertise.
- Considers any question to be a challenge to her authority.
- No tolerance to new ideas.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Resist the temptation to confront her with challenges to her attitude.
- Try not to resent her arrogance.
- Be patient and flexible.
- Present your ideas in a way that will not threaten her.
- Try to open her mind to new ideas.
- Must be an expert yourself.
- Soften your statements with words like ‘maybe’ and ‘what do you think’?

Challenge statement

I have been managing events for years, and have no doubt that the city venue would be the most cost effective. Since the venue is near our office, we can walk over after work. That will save many hours in productivity and it is certainly in line with Human Resources policy

Reaction from the group: Is he aware that this is the Year End Party we are talking about, and not the annual business conference?

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Case 5 – The Wishy-Washy One

Characteristics:

- Indecisive.
- Afraid of negative results.
- Procrastinate about decision making till it is too late and entire project suffers.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Try not to be angry.
- Be patient.
- Be sincere and genuine about helping.
- Foster trust so that he can relax and think clearly.
- Understand the basis of his objections.
- Show him decision making tools and techniques.
- Reassure him that his decision is good.

Challenge statement

There are so many nice places for Year End parties. The city is convenient and the atmosphere is vibrant. The beach is exotic and beautiful. City venues will be more expensive, but the standard of food will be high. The beach venue will certainly be better value for money, and we get some home cooked goodies....

Reaction from the group: Oh no... we don't have all day to listen to his pros and cons... will he ever decide?

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Case 6 – The Yes Me to Death Fraud

Characteristics:

- Sincere when he agrees to do something.
- Over committed and unable to deliver.
- Does not think beyond the present moment.
- Just can't say no.
- Wants things to work out.
- Makes excuses when things don't work out, and wonders why people are angry.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Try not to be angry.
- Do not blame and shame.
- Be kind and foster trust and honesty.
- Provide training on how to be organized.
- Ensure commitment – ask for word of honour.
- Put commitment and deadline in writing.
- Be clear about negative consequences for not completing projects on time.
- Build relationship so that problems of overextending himself can be discussed.

Challenge statement

Whichever venue you choose, let me take care of the bookings. And while I am at it, I will negotiate the food and wine list, and take care of special door gifts for everyone! Oh I just love organizing events....

Reaction from the group: Oh no... that's what he said last year too! And we ended up having to order from Pizza Hut and KFC. He just loves to look helpful it but could never deliver it

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Case 7 – Think they know but don't

Characteristics:

- Want to be appreciated.
- Craves attention and are very assertive about getting it.
- Knows just enough to be dangerous.
- Convincing but loses his charm at crunch time.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Try not to get angry with his exaggerations and lies.
- Catch him when he is giving out misinformation and put a stop to it.
- Ask questions to clarify specifics so that he becomes aware of what he does not know.
- Ask in a way that he does not feel humiliated, for example, 'That's fairly new information and maybe you haven't read it yet'?
- State the correct information as you know it.
- Thank him for anything that he has been helpful with.
- Be clear about the negative consequences of misinformation from his behaviour.
- Reinforce appreciation for correct information.

Challenge statement

But did you have the facts? The Beach Front Hotel is way out for everyone in the company. 9 out of 10 persons here live in or near the city, and to venture out to the Beach Front Hotel 70 km from where most of us live will be a huge inconvenience.

Reaction from group: He thinks he knows his stuff, but the statistics are all made up!

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Case 8 – The Deep, Deep Freeze

Characteristics:

- Passive, afraid of rocking the boat.
- A perfectionist who thinks that nothing measures up and withdraws in frustration.
- Could be full of hostility inside.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Goal is to get the person to talk.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Ask questions that start with who, what, where, when and how.
- Look and sound like you expect an answer.
- Try some humour to break the ice, for example, make some funny guesses about what he is thinking.
- Help him be aware of the consequences to his silence.
- Show him that his silence is costing wasted time and lack of input.
- Listen carefully when he starts to talk. There could be insights to his silence which could help in future conversations.

Challenge statement

Whatever

Reaction from the group: We really don't know what he's thinking.....

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Case 9 – The No, Not, Never person

Characteristics:

- A perfectionist who wants to get things right and not make mistakes.
- Have high standards for what should be done, when it should be done, who should do it, how it should be done which are not measured up in life.
- Believes everything will go wrong now and in the future.
- His negativity affects everybody around him.
- Genuinely believes that things are as hopeless as he thinks they are.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Goal is to move him from fault finding and negativity to problem solving and improvement.
- Do not try to get the person to be positive. He will drag you down.
- Accept his behaviour as early warning signal of trouble, as he may indeed have seen flaws that were really there.
- To counter his negativity, bring up the negatives before he does.
- Try reverse psychology. Tell him that he could not succeed and he might.
- Appreciate him for his good intentions, high standards, and willingness to speak up about details he is concerned with.

Challenge statement

Is it time for the Year End party again? Oh time flies. Do we really have to do this every year? It costs quite a lot of money, and frankly, I do not see what it has achieved....

Reaction from group: Oh come on, loosen up. You will enjoy the party if you are not so negative about it.

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Case 10 – Complaint Central

Characteristics:

- Wants to get things right.
- No idea about what to do to make things right.
- Feels hopeless which inspires his customarily whiny voice.
- Won't let you solve their problems for them.

Hints for handling the situation:

- Have patience, compassion and commitment to the process of getting him to look for solutions.
- Listen to the main points.
- Get specific about the complaints.
- Let him know that he has been heard.
- Shift focus to finding solutions.
- Ask very specifically what he wants.
- Do this till he comes up with a reasonable answer.
- Ask what he is going to do to make the solution come true.
- If he is not able to come up with solutions, let him know that you will discuss once he has a solution.

Challenge statement

The venue this year had better be at a convenient location, with clear direction. Last year I did not receive any detailed information and wasted 1 hour looking for the car park....

Reaction from the group: Oh, please stop complaining about what happened last year. It was over. We are tired of hearing it for the 20th time.

Your response

Create or re-enact a similar scene you have encountered before:

Your response

Observation and ideas

Track your progress

Working with difficult people takes time and patience, especially when it is a long term relationship, like work, family, neighbour or perhaps a child's teacher. If you are trying a new technique (for example, listening more and arguing less), it will take some time to become familiar with the technique, and the other person will take time to respond too. It will therefore be helpful to track your progress.

A journal will be a useful tool to keep track of the events as they occur, and help you reflect upon the incidences and gain a clearer perspective of the situation. It will also allow you to observe patterns in behaviour and prepare yourself for the next action. In the long run, your journal will be your trusted ally to whom you can confide in, gather your thoughts and develop better strategies for greater success.

Here's a worksheet that can be included as part of your journal. It can be used to systematically record your journey in dealing with the difficult person. Do remember to keep this information confidential. Do not leave the worksheets lying around in public areas. Electronic copies should be encrypted.

Working with difficult people worksheet

Difficult person (Name):					
Relationship:					
How is he/she difficult?					
What is the objective of the person?					
What is my objective?					
Is there any mismatch between our objectives?					
Is there any mismatch between our communication styles?					
Date	Event	Trigger	How I responded	Outcome	How could I improve next time?

Bonus ideas

1. Mediation

There may come a time when it is necessary to seek the assistance of a third party to resolve difficult conversations. For this to be successful,

- a. Both parties must agree to the mediation
- b. The mediator should be unbiased and not seen to be taking sides with any party.

2. Observation

It is difficult to observe your own reaction when you are emotionally involved in a heated discussion. Seek the advice and feedback of trusted persons on how you fared in a difficult encounter. If opportunity permits, try to observe the difficult person's interaction with others and learn from it.

3. A useful Mantra: I can handle this with strength and ease.

4. Celebrate success!

There is a lot of hard work involved in managing difficult relationships, but with perseverance, you will see success. Reward yourself at each milestone and keep going!

Conclusion

Well done! We have now reached the end of this workbook. Armed with the plethora of techniques and ideas, you are well on your way to better manage the difficult persons in your life.

Remember to exercise these skills whenever you can, till they come naturally to you.

All the best to harmonious relationships!

*"He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is
enlightened."
—Lao Tzu*