Module 9

Dealing with Difficult People

ITE Leadership Program
Objectives

• Recognize difficult behaviors.

• Identify the 2 primary sources of problems associated with actions of difficult people.

• Apply techniques for dealing with specific types of difficult people or special situations.
Think movie diva on the set. She can not and will not be satisfied.

Goes out of his way to be difficult. Dares others to do something about it.
Are Difficult People Taking a Toll on You?

Let’s start by assessing how well you handle difficult people.

Answer the following questions:
Your Assessment of Difficult People

1. I have difficult people reporting to me.
   - □ Agree   □ Not Sure   □ Disagree

2. I must work with difficult coworkers.

3. I report to a difficult person as my boss.

4. My subordinates take up too much of my time.

5. My coworkers take up too much of my time.
Your Assessment of Difficult People

6. My superiors take up too much of my time.

7. People who take up my time are difficult.

8. Difficult people make me unproductive.

9. Difficult people make their peers unproductive.

10. Difficult people cost my organization money.
Your Assessment Of Difficult People

Now score yourself:

Agree = 2 pts  Not Sure = 1 pt  Disagree = 0 pts

15-20 pts: You feel difficult people are disruptive, waste time, etc... They are a serious issue for you.

10-14 pts: Not sure whether difficult people are a problem for you, other people, or the organization as a whole. (You have thick skin or are in denial)

0-9 pts: Not convinced they are problematic. You are either correct or oblivious to what’s going on around you (You may be the difficult person!)
Introductory Thoughts and Questions

- Why are difficult people a problem in the workplace?
- Think of an example of when you were negatively impacted
“Every workplace has at least one difficult person. And if you are able to get rid of that person..., he or she will be replaced by two more difficult people.”
How do YOU generally respond to difficult people?

Does that solve the problem?

How many of you have a sure-fire way to handle difficult people?
In general, problems in dealing with difficult people stem from one of two sources:

• **Conflicting Expectations**
  
  ✓ *Expectations are never discussed, negotiated or agreed upon*

• **Unclear boundaries**
  
  ✓ *Physical*
  
  ✓ *Emotional*
Being the one who initiates the solution to problems that result from unrealistic expectations or unclear boundaries is one of the fastest ways to become more effective as a leader and a manager.
Experiences - Lessons Learned
Dealing with Difficult People

Ground Rule 1 – Don’t Be One

Ground Rule 2 – Establish Ground Rules with Difficult People First
Experiences - Lessons Learned  
Dealing with Difficult People

• Learn from past failures (don’t do it that way again)

• The skill level of a difficult person may not be the problem. He/she may be highly proficient.

• Personal problems (i.e., a home situation) may be the cause for a person being difficult at work
Experiences - Lessons Learned
Dealing with Difficult People

• It is hard to separate emotional connections from work requirements

• Try to understand the source of the problem. Stop to feel the other person’s pain.

• Remember – it is not personal. Difficult people are difficult with lots of people, not just you.
Experiences - Lessons Learned
Dealing with Difficult People

• Early intervention with a difficult person is usually best (run to the problem, not away from it)

• Problems do not tend to get better when left on their own

• Unhappy people make other people unhappy
Difficult people often have blurred boundaries. For example:

- **Difficult people tend to work outside their established limits**
- **Difficult people tend to overstep their authority**
Experiences - Lessons Learned
Dealing with Difficult People

- Seek counsel from wise people in dealing with difficult people
- Give the difficult person a graceful exit
- Document your dealings with difficult people
- Have your own exit strategy
Difficult Personalities

Michael the Minutia Monster

- **Characteristics** – Inefficient, wastes time, indecisive

- **Keep in Mind** – Obsession can be valuable if controlled

- **Coping Tactics** – Don’t focus on the obsession, help build other skills, break decisions into increments, establish priorities and deadlines
Barbara the Bully

• Characteristics – Deliberately intimidates others, thrives on fear

• Keep in Mind – You can’t bully a bully. They take it out on others

• Coping Tactics – Focus her energy on other activities, like things that make her feel important; become her friend
What Can You Do...

• If the difficult person is your boss
• To flush out the sniper
• To stop the steamroller
• To win the range war
Summary

• Difficult people are always difficult to deal with, but the problem will not go away

• They often do unexpected, drastic things

• You can deal with them if you know (or can find out) what causes it, and if you have ideas about how to cope with it (training)

• This module is a “starter kit” to point you in the right direction. Now go learn some more.
QUESTIONS?

Thank You

The End