

How To Deal With Difficult People

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SUMMARY

Understanding interpersonal conflicts in the workplace often requires recognizing that most people do not intend to be difficult. The root causes of such conflicts can include personal dislike, misaligned incentives, differing information, or abrasive communication styles. Addressing these issues effectively involves openly discussing the underlying tensions in a constructive manner.

- *Most individuals do not wake up intending to be difficult; conflicts often arise from misunderstandings.*
- *Possible root causes of workplace friction include personal dislike, misaligned incentives, differing information, and abrasive communication styles.*
- *Misaligned incentives are often overemphasized by operational leaders, but they are not the sole reason for conflicts.*
- *Recognizing and valuing different personality types can enhance team dynamics and collaboration.*
- *A useful technique for addressing conflict is to "call out the elephant in the room" in a dispassionate and non-accusatory manner.*
- *Initiating a conversation by expressing personal feelings can help lower defenses and encourage open dialogue.*
- *Addressing relationship dynamics before content issues can lead to more productive interactions and resolutions.*

[Music] one fundamental Insight of human nature is nobody wakes up in the morning saying oh I am going to be difficult today and yet we find that yeah from our perception some people are difficult but again recognize these people are not waking up in the morning saying okay yes I'm going to be difficult there's probably like a very very tiny percentage of the population that does most people you're interacting with they're not waking up in the morning

thinking they're going to be difficult so why does this happen what is the root cause so there are few possibilities here that we need to understand and recognize each of those possibilities one and this is the elephant in the room is that they just don't like you or you don't like each other but you have to work with each other so that's one possibility second possibility is the one that people fixate on it's not the only possibility but I want to call it

out it can sometimes happen that incentives are misaligned they are trying to optimize for something or they've been asked to optimize for something and you've been asked to optimize for something something else and there in lies the problem the problem with most operationally oriented product leaders is they think this is the only possibility so anytime something like this happens they keep going back up to Executives saying oh we need incentives to be aligned and you have a meeting right and still this kind

of disagreeableness and disagreement continues forever basically so I want to highlight it as the possibility but I

want to caution you that it is not the only possibility okay third possibility is that they're working off of different information now this information can be information in the ex external world but it can also be like their own processing the way they think is fairly different than the way you think one problem with our modern workplaces is that we don't

recognize the importance of personality but people have different personalities and you have to recognize it and that's actually a wonderful thing because that enables to quote a cliché there's some to be greater than the parts these are roughly kind of three possibilities and then sometimes the fourth one is that this person actually has the right intent and they kind of even like you and their incentives are also aligned with yours but their communication style is very abrasive like the content is

aligned but the communication is not and so then it can come across as being very difficult and these folks usually are cynical with everybody you're not the only one facing this for the first three maybe it's possible you are one of the few ones or only ones facing it but for the fourth one they're going to be like that with everybody so first you need to understand the root cause because only if you understand the root cause can you

try to address it the key thing I'll share around what you want to do in this kind of situation is a very useful technique and I learned this very late in my career from one of my last managers at stripe just call out the elephant in the room just call it out because nobody does remember people pay more attention to surprise people want to be right and they want to be liked you can derive this kind of formula of

call out dispassionately without any anger or like showing overly any emotion call out the elephant in the room what this means concretely is that at the right time perhaps with this individual you might say something like the following let's say this person's name is Bob so what you say is Bob can I ask you a question and why am I starting with that you want them to say yes because now they've let their guard down they feel like they are in control or

they have some degree of control of course Bob says then you follow it up with I have noticed that uh there is just a lot of friction in our interactions I have been feeling it for a long time and I could only really gather up the courage to share that with you right now it is something I've not felt with most colleagues sometimes I even find myself trying to avoid having a conversation because I don't want to

feel this friction and this kind of anim it and I just wanted to ask you cuz I I started thinking this morning perhaps if I'm feeling this way perhaps you are also feeling that way I just wanted to check in on your perspective so yeah I'm just curious what you think again you haven't made an accusation what you've said is I feel this way I'm just curious if you also feel this way so you're almost showing care for them and then

let them speak look in most cases what will happen when you do this first of all they'll be shocked that you brought this up because nobody brings up the elephant people avoid uncomfortable conversations and they admire people who can have uncomfortable conversations gracefully and because you did it gracefully the tone I used the words I used they were graceful they were not aggressive so what they are going to respond likely with

is oh no no actually

it's not that bad or or maybe they'll say I appreciate you bringing this up because I also feel this way and when that happens now is the point for you to take that conversation further because now you made a breakthrough you're no longer talking about content let's figure out this relationship thing first so again the specifics will vary and please use your judgment but this is the way you kind of make inroads in these types of

[Music] situations