Dealing With Difficult People

Dr. Tom Marrs
Licensed Psychologist
Employee Assistance Program
tmarrs@tamu.edu
979.845.3711
http://employees.tamu.edu/eap/
Agenda - Difficult People

• Who are they and why do they act that way?
• What is your role
• Tools, tricks and tips for coping with them
• Questions
Some Examples…

Let’s talk about examples of behaviors. If I were watching the person, how would I know they are difficult?
Different vs. Difficult
Difficult Behaviors

- Body language
- Disrespectful listening
- Gossip
- Avoidance, ignoring conflict
- Putdowns, Sarcasm, Hurtful humor
- Fault finding
- “Know it All”, Superior attitude
- Power struggles
- Passive aggressive behavior
- Unwanted imposition of beliefs/values
- Misuse of power or position, bullying
- Deliberate exclusion or aloofness
- Manipulation
Inappropriate Behaviors

These are not DIFFICULT behaviors, they are INAPPROPRIATE behaviors.

• Misdirected anger
• Discrimination/harassment
• Outbursts of anger/rage
• Threats
• Physical violence
Why Does It Happen?

- Impact of dysfunctional families
  - Lack of “appropriate behavior” for models
  - Stuck in the past
- Reward
- Low self-esteem
- Personality?

Remember: People are not difficult—their behaviors are
What Can You Do?

- Communicate
- Be Assertive/Set boundaries
- Change what you have control over
- There are only 3 ways to respond to things that happen in life
Emotional Intelligence

- The ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself—don’t get hooked
- By reciprocal determinism, that control can be used to control the emotions of others and of a group.
- Broken into Trait EI (The ability to recognize and control emotion) and Ability EI (The capacity to learn how to control emotion).
Self-Awareness
To Change Your Thinking…

- Examine the evidence
- The double-standard method
- Thinking in shades of gray
- Define terms
- The semantic method
- Re-attribution
- Cost analysis
Self Awareness: What you can do!

- Give up the need to be right.
- First seek to understand, then to be understood.
- Avoid acting defensively – Act neutral.
- Paraphrase the issue from their point of view and ask for clarification.
- Ask for additional information if needed.
- Explore options.
- Look for workable, realistic options; compromise may be necessary.
- Under-promise and over-deliver, but honor your agreements.
- Take a “time-out” if necessary.
Six Steps for Dealing with Difficult People

1. Assess the Situation.
2. Stop wishing the person were different.
3. Get some distance between you and the person.
4. Formulate a Plan.
5. Implement your plan.
6. Modify it as needed.
Final Thoughts

1. Remember the difference between *difficult* and *different*
2. Categorize: Control or No Control
3. I can control me-Reciprocal Determinism and Emotional Quotient
4. Self Awareness: Sometimes we are the ones who are difficult, or contribute to the problem with our behavior.
QUESTIONS