

Can We Talk?


Using Your Awesome Powers of Communication to Manage Difficult Conversations and Difficult People

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1

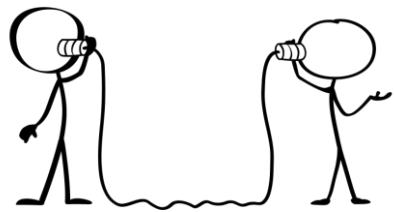
We all want to work in psychologically safe environments

- Where people feel safe enough to communicate without hidden agendas.
- Where anyone can speak to anyone and everyone has everyone's back.
- Where we can flourish personally and professionally and provide maximum benefit for those we serve.



2


Communication is the key!




3

Learning Outcomes


Today we will:



Identify the desired outcome of a difficult conversation



Discuss the steps in initiating and managing difficult conversations.




Develop an action plan to manage difficult conversations (and difficult people) in your professional setting

4

#1 Communicate Effectively

SEE HANDOUTS FOR COMPLETE INFO ON COMMUNICATION STYLES



5

Managing Communication

- Use Assertive Communication when you initiate conversations and in response to other's attempts to manipulate you using the other styles.
- Eliminate passive aggressive and aggressive communication from your daily interactions (this one step alone is GUARANTEED to substantially reduce your stress)

6

#2 Do It Now



Don't Play the Avoidance Game

7



Avoiding a difficult conversation that needs to take place is a REALLY bad strategy


8

How we play the avoidance game

- Don't speak up when someone has trampled on your professional or personal self esteem
- Allow others to take advantage of you
- Rationalize those who are behaving badly
- Think it's someone else's job
- Convince ourselves that it will get better on its own (it won't)

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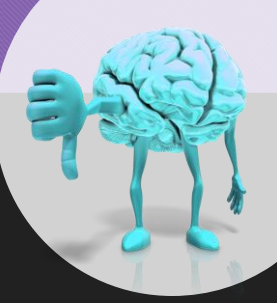
Failing to deal directly with the person with whom you are in conflict makes YOU a contributor to a toxic environment.



10

Intellectually, we know this...BUT

- Fear
- Discomfort
- "Too busy"
- Don't want to hurt intern's feelings
- Don't know how to start...or end



11

And before long that little problem...

Has become a BIG problem.



12

Which Keeps Getting BIGGER....



- "Temperature" is raised – you likely get angrier and less able to manage the conversation
- Workplace/Relationship has become more toxic
- Other person has continued problematic behavior unchecked.
- Your stress levels go through the roof.

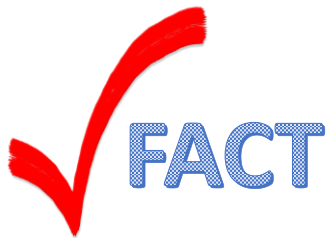
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#3 Adopt a Mindset of Inquiry



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You can't force others to change by insisting that they change

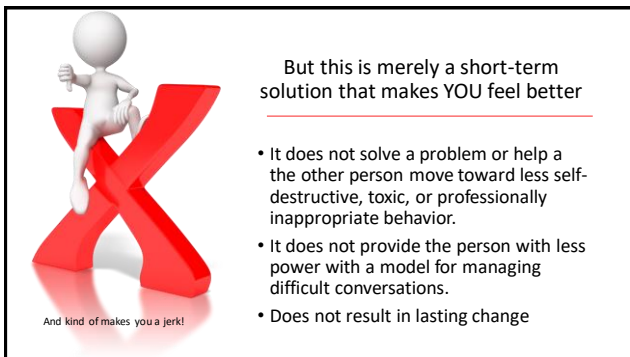


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If you happen to hold more power in the relationship (supervisor, adult, professor, etc.) you may think you can force someone to do something..

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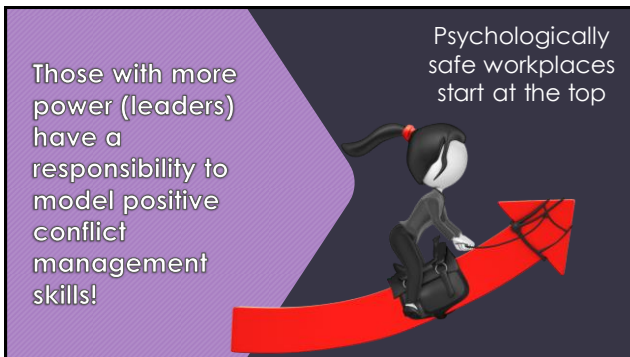


But this is merely a short-term solution that makes YOU feel better

- It does not solve a problem or help a the other person move toward less self-destructive, toxic, or professionally inappropriate behavior.
- It does not provide the person with less power with a model for managing difficult conversations.
- Does not result in lasting change

And kind of makes you a jerk!

17



Those with more power (leaders) have a responsibility to model positive conflict management skills!

Psychologically safe workplaces start at the top

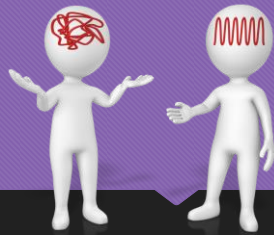
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Move from a "Change Conversation" to a "Learning Conversation"

- Engaging in a conversation to learn, listen, and understand often DOES result in change
- People are more likely to change when they feel heard and respected.
- People are more likely to change when they are free not to.

19

#4 Assume Your Assumptions are Wrong



20

Intentions are Complex

- We often make the mistake of assuming we know the other person's intentions based on the IMPACT of their behavior on us.
- (Because we interpret their behaviors through the lens of our own intentions)

21

Aware of	Unaware of
My intentions	Other person's intentions
Others person's impact on me	My impact on the other person

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A Learning Conversation helps us discover the other person's story and uncover their true intentions.



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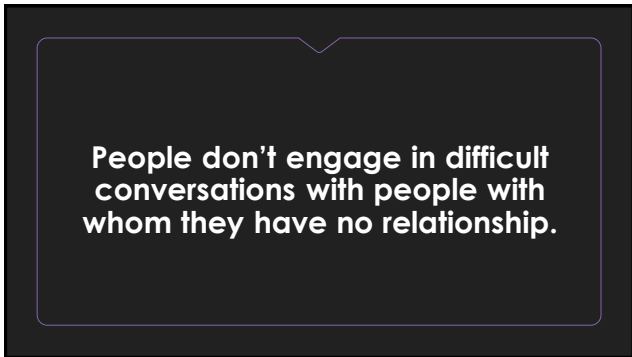
Now, we can move forward to solve the problem rather than wasting our time laying blame, proving we are right, or basking in our own smug self-righteousness



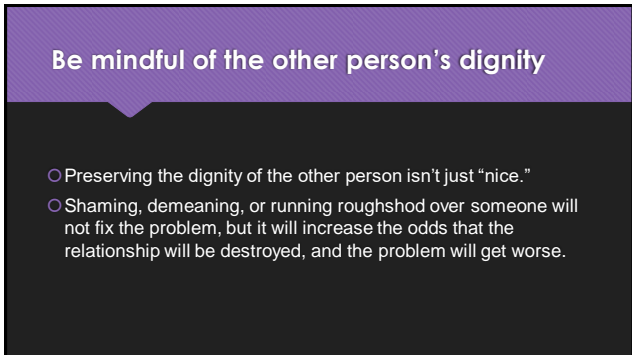
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The moment someone perceives disrespect, their behavior during the interaction becomes about defending their dignity.



28

Suspend Judgment

- Try to view the conversation as if you were a neutral third party.
- You may be upset, angry, or disappointed but give them the space to change by suspending your judgment.



29

Don't Play the Blame Game



30

Ditch the Blame

Injures relationships and causes pain and anxiety.

Makes YOU feel better but destroys potential for future relationship and collaboration

Inhibits our ability to learn the real cause of the problem and/or to do anything meaningful to correct it

31

Stop Arguing About Who is Right

- Creates a "winner" and a "loser"
- It's a waste of time and doesn't accomplish ANYTHING useful except to damage the relationship.

32

Your Step-by-Step Guide to Conquering Difficult Conversations

COURAGE

33

**Step 1:
PREPARE**

Being well-prepared for a difficult conversation isn't just nice, it's typically the difference between success and failure.

34




KNOW YOUR MISSION

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe we will just shoot a couple astronauts up there in a rocket and see what happens."

Said no Nasa Scientist EVER.

35



EVALUATE THE SITUATION

- Think carefully about what is bothering you.
- Consider if your actions or behavior could be causing any of the conflict.

36

Plan Your Difficult (Learning) Conversation

DIFFICULT CONVERSATION BLUEPRINT

WHO...

WHY...

WHAT...

HOW...

WHERE & WHEN...

WHAT...

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37

WHO DO I NEED TO TALK WITH?

- HINT: The answer is not “someone other than the person with whom I am in conflict.”
- Writing down the person’s name is the first step to helping you overcome avoidance
- (Now it’s a plan!)

DIFFICULT CONVERSATION BLUEPRINT

WHO...

38

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF ON THE WHY

- Sometimes a perceived conflict is more about what’s going on in your head, in your life, and inside you than what’s going on between you and someone else.
- In this case, a conversation with someone else is not going to be productive

DIFFICULT CONVERSATION BLUEPRINT

WHY...

39

WHAT IS THE DESIRED OUTCOME?

- Next, search in yourself and determine what a successful outcome of this conversation would look like.
- How would a "successful" conversation end?

WHAT...

40

GOLD STANDARD of OUTCOMES

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

"Preserve the Relationship"



41

HOW DO POWER DYNAMICS AFFECT THIS CONVERSATION?

HOW...



42

HOW DO POWER DYNAMICS AFFECT THIS CONVERSATION?



- SLP versus classroom teacher
- Supervisor versus student/intern
- Chair versus faculty
- Administration versus staff
- Family member versus professional
- Student/Client versus professional

HOW...

43

Acknowledge the power dynamic, but don't bow to it

- A Learning Conversation can be successful regardless of power dynamics.
- Acknowledge the power dynamics and modify plan as appropriate (more on this later).
- e.g. May need to make an appointment through another person rather than invite personally. Modify invitation statement appropriately.

HOW...

44

WHERE AND WHEN WILL THIS CONVERSATION TAKE PLACE

- Commit to a date that you will undertake this conversation and WRITE IT DOWN.
- If appropriate, consider inviting the other person to meet at a neutral location (Write this down, too).

WHERE & WHEN...

45

WHAT WILL BE YOUR OPENING LINE?

- Your Opening Line sets the tone for the rest of the conversation.
- The time you spend in developing a strong opening line substantially improves your chances that you will achieve your desired outcome.

WHAT... will be your opening line?

46

OPENING LINES ARE IMPORTANT!

- *"Your son can be very difficult. He is badly behaved and is undisciplined. You said he behaves well at home, but something must be going on."*
- *I don't think you respect my role as an independent professional. You need to listen to me.*
- *"I was very upset by what you said in front of the principal after the faculty meeting. That was very insensitive."*
- *It is apparent that you didn't read the comments I made regarding necessary revisions on this IEP.*

47

The Implicit Message

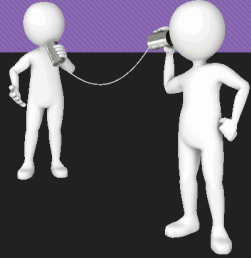
What the other person "hears"

Aware of	Unaware of
My intentions	Other person's intentions
Others person's impact on me	My impact on the other person

48

WHAT YOU SAY:

"Your son can be very difficult. He is badly behaved and is undisciplined. You said he behaves well at home, but something must be going on."



49

WHAT YOU MEAN

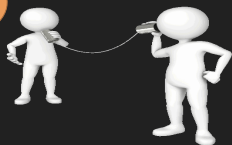
It's important that we are on the same page about how to best serve your son.

50

"Your son can be very difficult. He is badly behaved and is undisciplined. You said he behaves well at home, but something must be going on."

Your son is troublemaker, probably because you are a bad person/parent who has created a lousy home environment.

What they hear...



51

Very Likely Eliciting a Response Like This...

52

"Your son can be very difficult. He is badly behaved and is undisciplined. You said he behaves well at home, but something must be going on."

My son is perfectly well behaved around people that know how to handle children.

Your son is troublemaker, probably because you are a bad person/parent who has created a lousy home environment.

53

Build an Effective Opening Statement

Start from a neutral perspective

Offer an invitation to explore the issues jointly

54

Opening Statements Reframed

Start from a neutral perspective

Offer an invitation to explore the issues jointly.

- *"I know you have been putting a lot of time into your reports. There are still some areas that need work. I think perhaps my written feedback wasn't clear enough. Perhaps it might be more efficient if we spent a little time talking about it together. Let's set aside 20 minute after school either today or tomorrow so we can be sure you understand and can apply this when you are on your own."*

55

Opening Statements Reframed

Start from a neutral perspective

Offer an invitation to explore the issues jointly.

- *"I would like to talk with you about that happened at the meeting this morning. I was upset by something you said. I would like to explain what is bothering me and also hear your perspective on the situation. Could we meet for coffee later this afternoon?"*
- *"I wanted to share with you my concerns about Xavier's behavior in clinic and hear about your sense of what might be contributing to it. How about we meet in the lounge during Xavi's session tomorrow to brainstorm how to make therapy more successful for him?"*

56

3 Parts of a Learning Conversation

Learn Their Story

Express Your Feelings and Views

Problem Solve (Look to the Future)

57

Start with your well-rehearsed opening line....”

- Envision the conversation
- Take a deep breath
- Modulate your tone and expression to signal discussion not inquisition; exploration not punishment. (PRACTICE)
- PLUNGE

58

Then, Shut up....

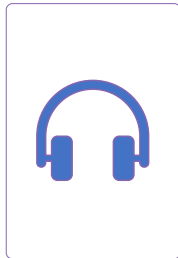
AND LISTEN to their story



59

JOB#1 Listen Authentically

Be Genuinely Curious. Hear their story.



60

SHUT UP and LISTEN



- Use Active Listening...Authentically!
 - Establish eye contact
 - Maintain neutral positive expression
 - Employ minimal encouragers – don't interrupt
 - Be mindful of your non-verbals – and theirs
 - If necessary – occasional reflective statements**
- Be comfortable with silence
- Be prepared for strong emotions

61

Tell Your Story

Your Turn

But, only when they are finished telling theirs

62

What to talk about

- Share impact of the situation/behavior on you
- Explore potential impact of previous experiences
- Take responsibility for your contribution
- Reflect on Identity Issues
- Describe feelings

63

Feelings Matter

- Your feelings will show themselves whether you consciously invite them to the party or not.
- Unexpressed feelings leak into difficult conversations
- Unexpressed feelings block the ability to listen – which requires an open and honest curiosity about the other person and willingness to keep the spotlight on them.
- Better to just say how you feel (without being a complete jerk about it) and move on

64

Don't play the Blame Game

- Blame is about judging – looks backward “Who’s to Blame?”
- When blame is the goal, understanding is the casualty
- Focusing on blame hinders problems solving
- When they are accused, they will do what accused people do....

65



Blame can leave a bad system or process in place and undiscovered

66

The Contribution Conversation



The Alternative to the Blame Game

67

Shift to the Contribution Conversation

- Goal is not to assign blame. Goal is to understand what happened so we can improve how we work together in the future.
- How did we each contribute to the current situation?
 - (How did we get ourselves into this mess?)
- What do we do differently going forward
 - (How do we get ourselves out of this mess?)

68

The contribution conversation looks **FORWARD** at problem solving.....



69



70


Invite a collaborative solution

- Brainstorm options that meet each side's most important concerns and interests.
- Create mutually agreed upon action steps
- Ensure that both parties leave the conversation knowing what will happen next
- Establish a way to keep communication open to determine when steps are completed.

71

Regaining Your Balance

If things start to go sideways...



72

Let go of Trying to Control their Reaction

- Don't measure success of a conversation based on whether or not the other person gets upset.
- Instead, give them space to be upset, take responsibility for any part you have in the problem, show compassion, work together to move forward.



73

Reframe the conversation



- Reframing is taking the essence of what the other person says and turning it back to the core of the conversation.
- "I'm right, you're wrong. That's all there is to it."
 - *You obviously feel very strongly about your perspective, but I'd like to share mine as well.*

74

Reframe the conversation



- "I don't see why I have to sign out tests when I'm bringing them right back. Don't you trust me?"
 - *"I understand that you don't see the need to sign out tests. I would like to help you understand the reasons for following this protocol."*

75

Use “yes, and...” statements

- Validates your view of the situation and that of the other person.
- Allows you to work at understanding the other persons point of view without giving up your own.
 - *“YES, I understand that you walked away from that meeting feeling disrespected and unheard AND I walked away feeling dismissed and confused.”*

76

Use “yes, and...” statements

- This allows you to move to the collaborative stage.
 - *“Now that we understand each other, what’s a good way to resolve this problem?”*

77

Nullify Roadblocks (“thwarting behaviors”)

- Be alert for behaviors that are designed to thwart the conversation.
- Stonewalling, Playing the Victim, Blaming, Redirecting.
- Use Assertive communication – label the behavior, bring conversation back to the core of the topic at hand.
 - *“It’s difficult for me to understand your point of view when you are trying to place the blame on someone else. Remember, our goal here is to make sure you have the skills you will need to be a professional SLP.”*



78

Take a break

- If all else fails, excuse yourself to gather your composure or take a brief cognitive break.
- Re-schedule or schedule a second meeting if you feel depleted, bogged down, or there is too much to tackle in one meeting.



79

Dealing with Difficult People

Working with **YOU** is Killing **ME!**



80

Difficult People are Difficult Because they are Reinforced for Being Difficult!

- Difficult people don't become difficult overnight
- They are difficult because they have years of "success" in getting their way



81

Our job is to break the cycle....

or they will continue to be difficult because it is **WORKING FOR THEM!**



82

The behaviors difficult people exhibit are a reflection of their inner state

- People who are bored, unhappy, insecure, unmotivated, immature and/or incompetent try to take others down with them – to wallow in THEIR misery.



83

Difficult People have a **CHOICE** in how they behave

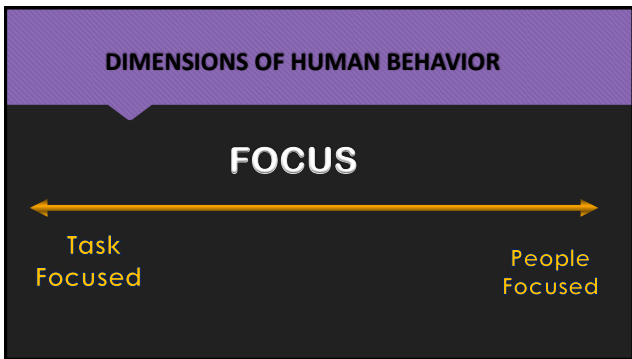
NO ONE IS FORCING THEM TO BE DIFFICULT



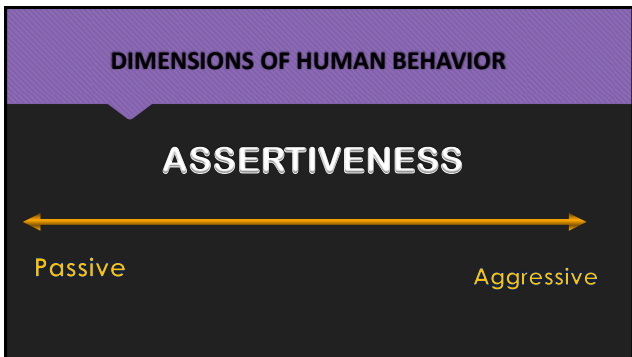
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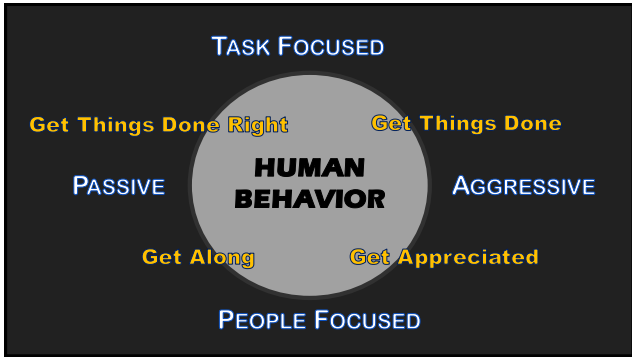
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87



88

TASK FOCUSED PEOPLE

INTENT:

- To get things done (Aggressive)
- To get things done right (Passive)

NEED:

- Control
- Perfection

89

PEOPLE FOCUSED PEOPLE:

INTENT:

- To get appreciated (Aggressive)
- To get along (Passive)

NEED:

- Attention
- Approval

90

When Intent is not Met...

- Get it Done People become more Controlling
 - Try to take over and push ahead
- Get it Right People become more Perfectionistic
 - Finding every flaw and potential error

91

When Intent is Not Met...

- Get Along People become Approval Seeking
 - Sacrificing personal goals to please others
- Get Appreciated People become Attention Seeking
 - Trying to force others to notice them

92

IMPORTANT!

You can't control the behavior of others, you can only control your own behavior.

Your Behavior
=
Your Life

93

✓ Learn to Identify Intent

Step #1 when dealing with ALL types of difficult people.



94

✓ Use Assertive Communication

- Do not get sucked into the black hole of non-productive conversation with difficult people.
- Say what you mean, mean what you say.
- Expect respect

LEADERS: You must model assertive communication as the standard for others. **This is your #1 job.**

95

✓ Conserve Your Energy

Energy spent dwelling on negative people.....

- how badly they have treated you
- how unfair it all is
- how miserable they make you

...is energy that could have been spent on YOUR personal well-being (and creating your difficult conversation plan).

“Where Attention Goes, Energy Flows”

96

✓ Dump the Victim Mentality

- Whining is not a substitute for action!
- Feeling sorry for yourself or bemoaning your situation will NOT change it.
- It's your job to change your environment if you don't like it.

"You're nobody's victim without your permission." Eleanor Roosevelt

97

✓ Don't be drawn into Conflict (Rise above the Fray)

Have a
mint!



98

Pause and Visualize

- Put your difficult person in a box at the end of the day
- Close the box
- Do not open the box until you get back to work



99

✓ Don't Reward Difficult People for their Bad Behavior



- Many times we aren't aware that we are actually adding to the problem.
- When we back down, give in, give up, or give ground, we are just rewarding difficult people for being difficult.

100

Backtrack

- Repeat **EXACTLY** what the difficult person has said (Even if it makes no sense to you)
- This signals to them that you have been listening.
- Not the same as summarizing or rephrasing!
- It also lets them hear their own words – which sometimes don't sound quite so convincing when someone else says them.

101

Blending

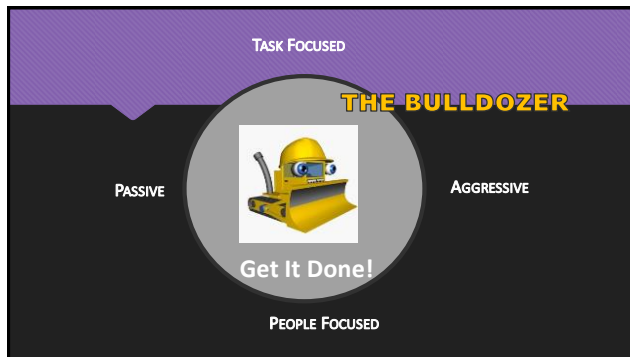
- The first step in managing difficult people is to minimize the perceived differences between you.
- Blend your behavior and communication to match the intent, body language, and communication style of your difficult person.

102

If you are dealing with someone who wants to:

- **Get it Done** You acknowledge the importance of getting tasks done and your conversations are brief and to the point.
- **Get it Along** You take time to engage in chit-chat and considerate communications (lots of “please” and “thank yous”.)
- **Get Appreciation** You acknowledge their contributions with words of enthusiastic appreciation.


103



104

The Bulldozer

Intent: Get Things Done



- Aggressive
- Controlling
- Overbearing
- Pushy
- Angry
- Obnoxious
- Uses fear and intimidation to get what they want

Other names/variations: The Jerk, The Screamer, The Blamer, The Tyrant, The Superintendent

105

The bulldozer barges into your office while you are trying to prepare for your class, which begins in 15 minutes.

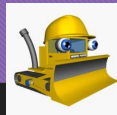
You just finished supervising treatment clinic and have a research committee meeting right after class.



“Shari! I assigned you to create the assessment plan for the department a week ago. Why isn't this done yet?!! The Provost is on my back and it's making me look bad. Do your job!!”

106

Do:
Command Respect



- Stand your ground
 - ~ Make eye contact
 - ~ Visualize
 - ~ Breathe
- Interrupt (Use Name)
- Identify Intent
- Provide a “Bottom Line”
- Peace with Honor

Aggressive people like bulldozers require assertive responses

107


- Let the bulldozer wind down (stand your ground/listen)
- “Lori, Lori, Lori, Lori...” (Interrupt the attack)
- “I understand that you are concerned about being in compliance with the university assessment plan so we do not lose funding” (Identify intent)



108

○ “From my point of view, investing in the time we need gathering input from all department faculty will help facilitate buy-in. Otherwise, we may end up with a plan, but no one willing to implement it. That may make our job even harder down the line.” (Bottom Line)


○ “I’m preparing for class right now, but I will be more than happy to schedule a time to talk about this. I would be happy to hear your thoughts and ideas. How about Wednesday at 2:00?” (Peace with honor)



109

○ “From my point of view, investing in the time we need gathering input from all department faculty will help facilitate buy-in. Otherwise, we may end up with a plan, but no one willing to implement it. That may make our job even harder down the line.” (Bottom Line)


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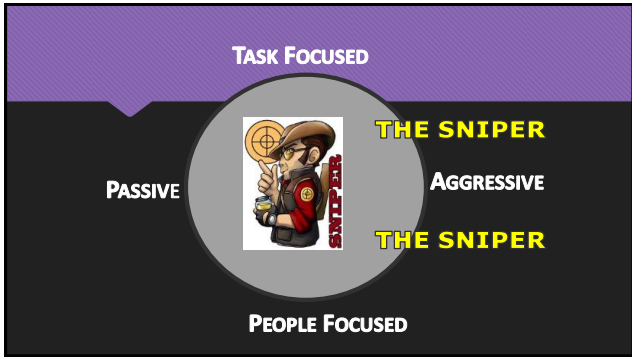
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DON'T

- Push back/Counterattack
- Become defensive
- Get drawn into an argument
- Try to prove you are “right”
- Allow yourself to get run over, have your time invaded, or withdraw from the interaction
- (You can train bulldozers to respect you by remaining in control of your own behaviors)



111



112

The Sniper

Intent:
Get It Done OR Get Appreciated

- Goal of the sniper is to make you look bad
- Believes that in order for them to “win” someone else has to “lose.”
- But operates in the dark – too much of a coward to communicate directly



Variations of the Sniper, the Tattler, The Janus (two faced)

113

The Sniper

- Tries to discredit others to get what they want.
- Too cowardly to use assertive communication - “covert operations”
- Rude comments to others (just within earshot),
- Sarcastic Humor and Put Downs - Often defended as “just having fun” or “just teasing”
- Eye Rolls/Side Eye
- Rumor-Mongering

114

DO

Adjust your Attitude

- **Bring the sniper out of hiding**
 - Deal directly and assertively and you will disarm the sniper
- **Keep your cool.**
 - Reacting to snipers in any way other than through assertive communication gives them power and motivates them to keep doing it
- **Remember that sniping is a symptom of insecurity**
 - Think of them as an insecure grade-schooler
 - ("I am rubber you are glue, whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you!")

115

PUT THE SNIPER IN THE SPOTLIGHT

- **STOP and IMMEDIATELY address the situation**
- "So, I just heard you say you don't think my research is important (backtracking)
- **USE SEARCHLIGHT QUESTIONS:** "When you say that, what exactly do you mean? (bring the sniper out of hiding and disarm him or her)
- "What, can't you take a joke?" (typical sniper response)
- "I can take a joke, but I'm still wondering what you meant by stating my research wasn't important." (stand your ground)



116

IDEAL

The sniper admits bad behavior and backs off and/or apologizes



You then end the confrontation

117

(But don't give up!)



- The sniper does not acquiesce in which case YOU do not give ground.
 - Use broken record technique (“**please explain why you think my research is a joke.**”)
 - Interrupt the interrupter (“**That’s not the question**”)
 - State your bottom line (“**Unless we can trust each other, our collective success is limited.**”)

118

Third Party Sniping (Tattling)

- Tattling happens for the same reasons it happened in middle school: Immaturity, need for attention, trying to establish a sense of importance, trying to undermine others.
- Rule #1 for leaders – DON'T GET DRAWN INTO TATTLING
- Rule #1 for everyone else – DON'T GET DRAWN INTO TATTLING



119

Go directly
to the tattler
and ask:



Did you say this about me?

120

DON'T

- Let the Sniper/Tattler have power over you
- Let them hide in the shadows
- **Allow others to engage in third party sniping "tattling" with you.**

121

TASK FOCUSED

THE WHINER

PASSIVE



Get It Right

AGGRESSIVE

PEOPLE FOCUSED

122

The Whiner

Intent: Get It Right

- Only offers complaints – never solutions
- Complaints are not geared to change
- Complains to EVERYONE but the offending party
- Wants things to be right, but can only see what's wrong
- Wallows in worries and woe



123

DO



- Listen with compassion – briefly
- Interrupt if necessary
- Ask them if there is something specific that you can do to help them solve their problem
- Direct them to the proper person
- Draw the line

124



Blah...blah...blah...



I am doing the work of three people.
I want three more people hired.

YOU

"Yes, I know that you are working hard, but I don't make hiring decisions. So **what, exactly, can I do for you?**"
(ask for a specific solution)

125



Blah, Blah, Blah....
(whiner keeps whining)

YOU

"Kristy, our friendship is important to me, but there's no point in complaining if nothing can be done. If you want to talk to me about solutions or anything other than problems, my door is always open."

(Draw the line)

126

DON'T

- **Agree with whiners** – it just encourages them to keep whining
- **Disagree** – they will feel compelled to repeat their problems
- **Try to solve their problems** – this reinforces their bad behavior – and they will continue to come to you to solve their problems or try to get you involved in their issues



127

The Bully

Intent (get it done, get it done right, get appreciated, get attention)



- Demonstrates behaviors associated with multiple types of difficult people (the bulldozer, the tyrant, the egomaniac, the sniper, the tattler, the whiner, and others)
- May operate from a variety of intents
- Cannot be happy unless others are miserable
- Must have willing accomplices
- Lives in a world of misery and self-contempt

128

Important Facts About Bullies

- **Bullying is not about you.** You're not the one with the problems, so you shouldn't ever take bullying personally.
- **Bullies have serious insecurity issues,** and the easiest way to feel empowered is to pick on someone that they perceive as weaker.
- **Bullies want power and control over you** because they lack it in some aspect of their own lives.
- **Their main goal is to try to make you look bad or feel bad in order to make themselves feel good**

129

DO

Expect respect from a bully



- Consider their motivation (and use skills already discussed as appropriate)
- Limit your interactions with the bully
- Don't play the victim/take the bait (Embrace the power of not giving a ... darn.)
- Practice/have a plan for confronting the bully
- Document bad behavior
- Consider your Safety
- Vote with your feet if leadership does not take bullying seriously

130

DO for Leaders



- You **MUST** address and rein in bullies
- Use Assertive Communication to state the problem, discuss and solution, and follow up (See Difficult Conversations seminar!).
- Ensure there are checkpoints and consequences. (work with leaders above you in the leadership "food chain" as necessary)
- Follow through.
- Don't **BE** the bully.

131

Assertive Communication/Searchlight Questions for Bullies

- "Help me understand why you are ignoring me. That way we can address the problem and keep our workplace a positive place."
- "Do you have a question about my idea? You dismissed it without considering it. Let's talk specifics in order to make sure you are understanding my proposal."

132

DON'T



- Allow yourself to be intimidated.
- Agree with or join the bully's team
- Allow emotion to get in the way. Keep the discussion neutral on your side.
- Attack the bully. This just escalates the situation (and you risk being perceived as part of the problem)
- Allow the bully to suck energy out of YOUR life to feed his or her miserable soul...

133

What if nothing works? (or the difficult person is your boss)

Sometimes you have to give yourself permission to give up.



134

- You must then have a frank conversation with yourself.
- Is this job (or marriage or friendship or relationship) worth the damage it is doing to me?
- What is the healthy choice for me (my family, my spouse)?
- "There is always a Plan B."



135



- Not all situations are resolvable.
- Some are not WORTH resolving.
- Persevering under hostile circumstances can be toxic to your health and well being.
- Voting with your feet MAKES SENSE when it no longer makes sense to continue to deal with the difficult person.
- Sometimes the best strategy is to walk away.
