

Working Successfully With Difficult Behavior

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+ Outline



- Why are people disruptive
- Civility
- Types of disruption
- Broad techniques
- Behavioral types
- Specific techniques and solutions

+ Who is exhibiting the difficult behavior?

- A customer or client
- A peer colleague
- A subordinate
- A supervisor or manager
- Someone otherwise unrelated
- You?

- *Vary response according to relationship*



+ Understanding Difficult Behavior?

- Remember, it is about perspective
- It works (at some level) for the difficult person
- Dealing with them can cause workplace conflict.
- Not dealing with them WILL cause workplace conflict.
- Cause stress in the workplace.
- Can reduce organizational effectiveness.



+ What Makes a Person Behave That Way?

- Learned behavior
- Lack of social skills
- Reacting to own strong emotions
- Power or control over others
- Is effective and has been reinforced
- Gets needs met
- Provides attention or reactions



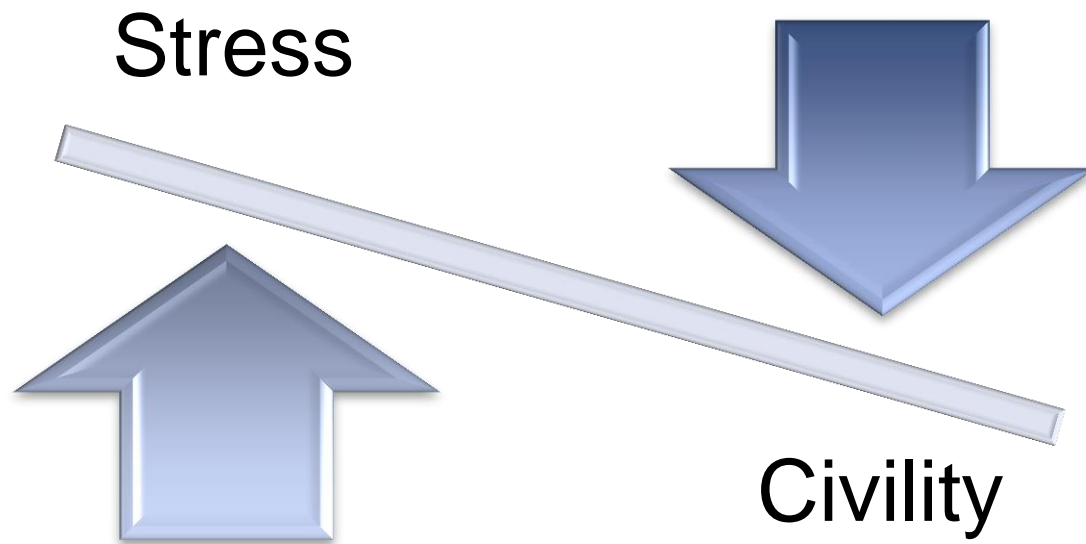
+ What Makes a Person Behave That Way? (Cont)

- Stress
- Insecurity
- Selfishness
- Confusing aggressiveness with assertiveness
- Excessively needy
- Ignorance/cluelessness





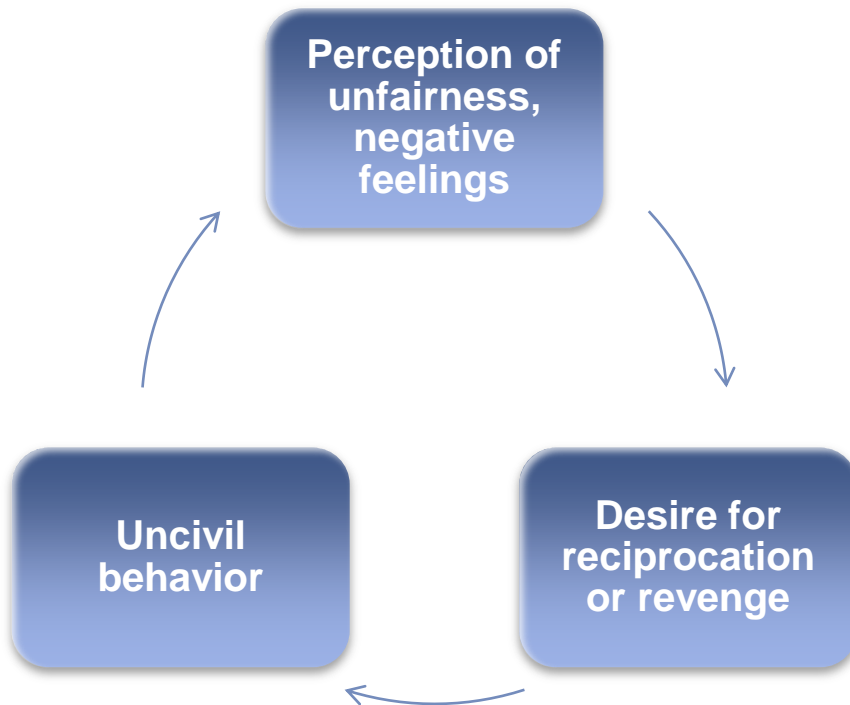
Stress and Civility





The Incivility Spiral

(Adapted from Andersson & Pearson, 1999)



In one survey of 800 employees, 94% of respondents said that when they are treated in an uncivil manner they “get even” with the offender



Reducing Conflict



- You deter workplace conflict whenever you respond appropriately to disruptive or threatening behavior by setting boundaries early on.

+ It Absolutely Is Not Personal

- Change your views
 - Think of the person as an acting out child who needs help
 - “They are behaving inappropriately right now” versus “They are a bad person”
 - “They are not really mad at me, they just have not learned how to manage their anger”
 - “I may be able to handle this situation well, if I remain calm

Dealing with Difficult Behavior

■ De-escalation

- Keep a steady low voice
- Offer solutions not roadblocks
- Focus on process
- Active listening
- Document, document, document!

■ Self-Care

- Avoid personalizing
- Be objective
 - View the experience as if on a movie screen
- “De”-Stress
 - Debrief
 - Take a break
 - Breathe

+ Modeling Appropriate Behavior



- Remember pleasantries
- No interrupting
- Be open-minded
- Use workplace intelligence
- Be aware of your tone and volume
- Don't argue for the sake of being right
- Be respectful, even in disagreement

+ Modeling Appropriate Behavior

- Use active listening skills
- Depersonalize your comments
- Address conflicts in private when possible
- Be aware of your own defensiveness
- Avoid accusations / ask questions instead



+ Reflective Listening



- Pay attention and follow the speaker
- Assume the speaker has something to say
- Search for the speaker's real meaning
- Restate the meaning
 - Use your own words
 - Be brief
 - Without interpretation
- Look and listen for “YES”

+ Planning Your Response

- Should you face it alone? How, specifically?
- Should a third party be present?
- Should you consult with someone?
- What outcome do you desire?
- Is physical safety an issue? Other risks?
- What support/back-up do you have?
- Should you just leave the situation?



+ What Do You Know About Their Point of View?

- Are they new to their job?
- Are they feeling pressured?
- Are they overwhelmed or in crisis?
- Are they aware of your experience or completely self-absorbed?



+ Communication Techniques



- **Fogging:** Partial agreement – find something true in what the person is saying and validate that
- **Paraphrasing:** Summarize the message in your own words
- **Negative Assertion:** Accept and admit your own errors without feeling like a failure or a rotten person

+ Communication Techniques (Cont.)



- **Defusing:** Ignore the content of someone's anger and delay further discussion to a later time/date (Set a specific time)
- **Circuit Breaker:** Respond to criticism with one word or very clipped statements
- **Inquiry:** Gather additional information or details from the person



+ Types of “Difficult”



- Know it all
- Classic Bully
- Wet blanket
- Stallers
- Silent types
- Indecisive
- Saboteur
- Poor Me
- Controller
- Agreeable
- Powerless person
- Mentally unhealthy

+ Know It All



- Actions:
 - Often uses threats, sarcasm, intimidation, and real or imagined status

- Techniques:
 - Prepare well for interactions
 - Ask questions and play to their perception of status
 - Focus on solutions to problems
 - Do not directly confront them

+ Classic Bully

- Actions:
 - Loud & hostile
 - Abusive
 - Overwhelming
- Techniques
 - Let them run out of steam
 - Don't allow interruptions
 - Ask them to leave if they escalate



+ Two Main Types of Bullying

- **Direct:** Physical and verbal aggression including kicking, punching, spitting, poking, verbal assaults, verbal taunts, and open threats to harm
- **Indirect:** Less obvious hurtful behaviors including gossip, excluding someone from a group, teasing, and threatening to withdraw friendship or allegiance



+ Wet Blanket



- Actions:
 - Dampen enthusiasm
 - Everything will fail/is bad
 - Constantly complaining
- Techniques:
 - Don't argue back
 - Listen and solicit alternatives from them
 - Don't agree or apologize
 - Switch to problem solving

+ Stallers



■ Actions:

- Reluctant to say no
- Wants to be liked
- Afraid/unable to manage
- Paralyzed by tough decisions

■ Techniques:

- Surface hidden concerns
- Help them resolve the problem
- Make decisions and solicit support (document)
- Support the person when they DO make decisions

+ Silent Types



- Actions:
 - Silent and unresponsive
 - Turns away from people, isolates
 - Pretends nothing happened
- Techniques:
 - Meet with them individually
 - Give them time to open up
 - Ask open-ended questions
 - Wait for responses, don't jump in
 - If there continue to be no comments, comment on what's happening in the office.

+ Indecisive

- Actions:
 - Super helpful but...
 - Postpones decisions
 - Hints at things, beats around the bush, doublespeak
- Techniques:
 - Address fears with “what if” questions
 - Help examine facts
 - Watch for anger or withdrawal



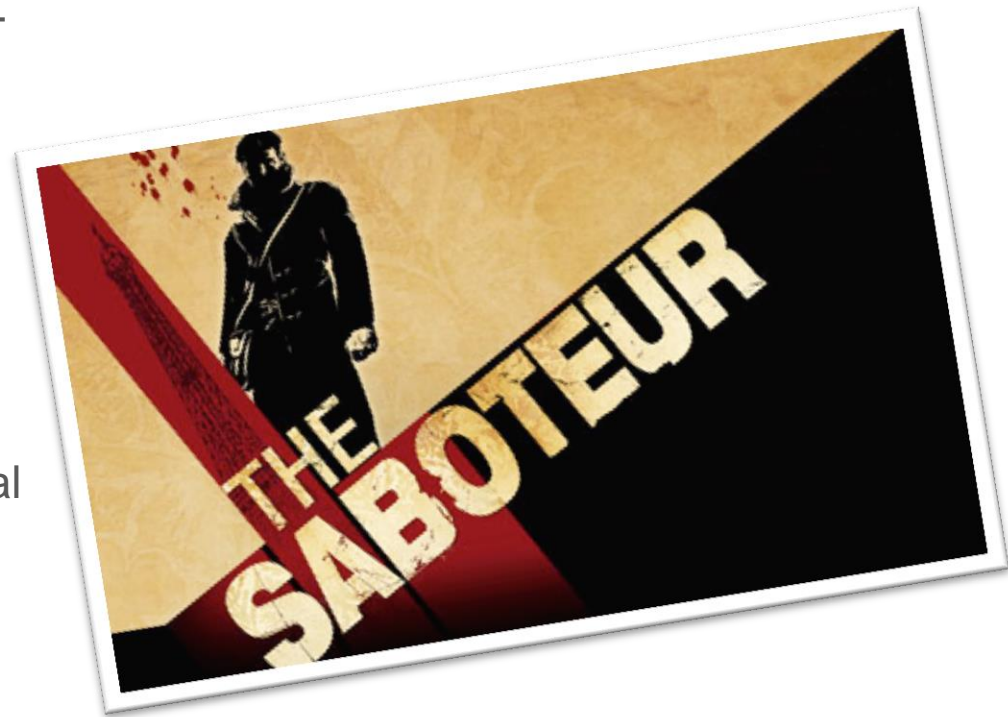
+ Saboteur (Indirect bully)

■ Actions:

- Excludes key people
- Withholds information strategically
- Uses innuendoes, digs, and non-playful teasing
- Wreak havoc when supervisors aren't around

■ Techniques:

- Surface the attacks
- Provide peaceful alternatives
- Seek group confirmation or denial of person's criticism
- Use coaching/counseling if assigned tasks are not done



+ Poor Me



■ Actions:

- Gain attention – “its always me”
- Try to gain control and make changes for them without team consideration
- Passive self-centeredness

■ Techniques:

- Dig for specifics
- Identify true concerns
- Point out where not true
- Focus on positives

+ Controller

■ Actions:

- Gets into everyone's business
- Undermine and insult others abilities
- Lack of trust and confidence
- Renders subordinates ineffective

■ Techniques:

- Build trust
- Take small steps toward authority
- Keep focus on solutions
- Speak from your own point of view
- Don't let yourself be verbally abused, draw appropriate boundaries.
"You're stupid!" is not ok.



+ Agreeable

- Actions:
 - Very personable
 - Don't follow through on things they say they will
 - Supportive but don't deliver
- Techniques:
 - Don't set yourself up
 - Prevent unrealistic commitments
 - Make honesty non-threatening
 - Point out inconsistencies in behavior
 - Work for mutual benefit



+ Powerless Person

- Actions:
 - Always points to a higher authority
 - Invokes “It’s out of my hands”
- Techniques:
 - Invite both of you to talk to the “higher authority” together.



+ Mentally Unhealthy



■ Actions:

- Unreasonable
- Unexpected
- Unexplainable

■ Techniques:

- Consult, consult, consult
- Maintain appropriate roles and boundaries
- Provide resources
- Document, document, document

+ Difficult v. Violent

- Indicators of violence potential
 - Poor impulse control
 - Perceived injustice history
 - Obsession
 - Substance abuse
 - Major mental illness
 - Preoccupation with violence



+ Types of Threats



- *Direct* – specific and straight forward
- *Indirect* – vague and ambiguous
- *Veiled* – sinister innuendo
- *Conditional* - extortion

+ Abuse Continuums

Verbal Abuse

- Complaint
- Negative
- Abusive
- Derogatory
- Verbally threatening/assaulting

Physically Abusive

- Complaint
- Passive resistance
- Active resistance
- Assault
- Deadly assault



Response to Escalating Individuals



- Check your own emotional reaction to the situation
 - *We tend to misunderstand difficult people by focusing solely on what they do, not what we do in response to their words and actions.*
- Use active listening by acknowledging the feelings of the individual
- Explain clearly, directly what is acceptable
 - “You certainly have a right to be angry but not to hit or break things.”
- Allow the person to vent (within reason): don’t interrupt, especially during the first minute of peak anger.

+ Response to Escalating Individuals Cont.

- Be firm: focus on what the process is to resolve the situation.
- Set limits calmly, gently
 - “Your yelling makes it difficult to listen”
 - “Please stand back, you’re too close”
- Report behavior to appropriate response teams. The University does not expect you to be an expert in threat assessment:
CONSULT!

+ Typical Responses to Threatening Behavior

- Minimize – “it’s really not that bad”
- Rationalize – “he’s just going through a rough time”
- **Key Question!**
 - If everyone behaved this way, what would be the impact? Would you tolerate it?



+ Case Example: Part 1

Your department fields a call by Kevin in which he is demanding that HR fire someone in another department for their “incompetence.” When he discovers that you are unable to take such actions he becomes verbally abusive on the phone, yelling, swearing, and demanding that you meet his needs.



+ Discussion



■ Signs

- Kevin's behaviors of yelling, swearing, and demanding are considered *intimidation*.

■ Response

- Do not get into a shouting match. Lower your voice, remain calm, and do not interrupt him.
- Focus on the process to reach resolution. Describe the necessary steps he can take and offer to walk him through the steps.

+ Case Example: Part 2



Kevin informs you that he is going to come to the your department and “do what it takes” to get his needs met.



+ Discussion



- Signs
 - Kevin’s expression that he will “do what it takes” is considered a *threat*.
- Response
 - Alert your manager/supervisor.
 - Consult with the Workplace Violence Response Team immediately on a suitable plan of action.
 - If you feel imminently at risk of physical harm, call 911.



Case Example: Part 3



Kevin, surprisingly, shows up at the front desk, pounding his fist, demanding that he speak to “someone who has some authority!”

+ Discussion

■ Signs

- Kevin's fist pounding is considered *bullying, intimidation, a threat, and violent behavior.*

■ Response

- Be firm and focus on the process. For example, you could say “My manager is Mr. James, let me call him and he can discuss this further with you.”
- Call the appropriate supervisor and initiate the active threat warning system in your office.
- If you feel the individual is uncontrollable, imminently dangerous, or has a weapon, find a way to excuse yourself and either call 911 or ask a co-worker to call for you.
- **If you can not leave the area, dial 911 and leave the receiver off the hook.**

+ Conclusion



- Document, Document, Document!

- Consult, Consult, Consult!