



[DR. SHIRLEY SAYS...]

By: DR. SHIRLEY A. WHITE
President
Success Images

Reprinted from the December 2005/January 2006 issue of BIC

Keeping peace in the office

Our workplace today is full of challenges, including the diversity of people with whom we come in contact. In fact, we are bound to run into a co-worker who irritates, aggravates, or in some way or at some time, annoys us. So, when we find ourselves in one of those difficult situations, what should we do?

In "Coping with Difficult People," a book written by Robert M. Bramson, Ph.D., he reminds us that our reaction and attitude toward a difficult person are the most important defenses we have, since we can control both. Bramson also suggests that we maintain a positive attitude, be direct, descriptive and nonjudgmental.

Other strategies and tips to help you handle difficult co-workers and keep peace in the office include:

A key to handling difficult situations is to focus on what you can do to make it better.

➤ Visualize the big picture. Consider how important the issue really is. Ask yourself, "Is this professional relationship worth sacrificing, or is the best solution to simply walk away rather than getting terribly upset?" On the other hand, if you feel that the situation is a big deal, then proceed with the appropriate strategies.

➤ Be solution-oriented. A key to handling difficult situations is to focus on what you can do to make it better. Remember, you have little control over the personality and

behavior of another person. So, ask yourself, "What am I doing that may be contributing to this unpleasant situation?" Then, consider what behavior you should possibly change.

➤ Time your discussion appropriately. Timing here is just as important as in other aspects of life. When something unacceptable happens, we should usually take enough time to ensure that we don't blurt out things they we will regret later. Be sure to plan your approach in a non-accusatory manner, and think before your speak. You might try a tactic such as, "Debbie, I've noticed that we seem to have our differences. What can you think of that we might do to get along better?" When possible, find things to agree on.

➤ Address the issue, rather than attacking the person. To do this successfully, you should be prepared with facts, not gossip or rumors.

➤ Don't assume. Ask questions. In addition, let the other person know how you perceive things. For example, you might say, "I'm concerned that the way your statement came across was a little ... What were your thoughts in saying that?" Always be aware of your tone of voice, and strive to keep it calm.

➤ Avoid defensive body language (crossed arms, rolling of the eyes, heavy sighing, rigid posture). Give the person your full attention, maintain good eye contact and avoid moving into the other's personal space.

➤ Approach the difficult co-worker in a respectful, courteous

manner. This helps defuse hostility. It is generally a good idea to handle conflict situations in private rather than for public display.

➤ Listen rather than argue. Ask for clarification. Making sure you've heard the person correctly goes a long way in keeping communication clear. For example, "Just to be sure we're on the same page, are you saying that you ..." is a technique that gives the person you are speaking with a chance to confirm that you've heard them correctly, or to refine the message.

In addition to utilizing these strategies, we must also consider, or at least proceed on the premise, that a difficult co-worker may probably not change. We can ultimately only be responsible for our behavior and how the behaviors of others are allowed to affect us. This is crucial since the task that we have in dealing with difficult co-workers and keeping peace in the office is more about "us" than it is about "them." We're the ones ultimately responsible for putting a stop to the behavior that upsets us. If the problem continues after you've tried to address it, perhaps you'll need to talk with your supervisor or someone else about your concerns.

In the end, when we deal effectively with difficult co-workers, it helps us, it helps them, it helps our customers, and it keeps peace in the office.

To inquire about Dr. White's programs and publications, please contact her at (225) 769-2307, or visit her Web site at www.successimages.com. □