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# Creating a harmonious workplace

**F**amily businesses, small or large, are experiencing many personnel challenges in today's workplace. Outside employee or family members are those co-workers who, in some manner, irritate, aggravate or annoy. So, when you find yourself in one of those demanding situations, how do you proceed?

Dr. Robert M. Bramson, author of "Coping with Difficult People," 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 we maintain a positive attitude, be direct, descriptive and nonjudgmental.

Eight additional strategies to help you create and maintain harmony in the workplace are:

- 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 upset?" On the other hand, if you feel the situation requires discussing, proceed appropriately.

- Be solution-oriented. Essential to handling challenging situations is to focus on what you can do to make it better. Remember, you have little control over the behavior of another person, even a family member. So, ask yourself, "What am I doing that may be contributing to this unpleasant condition?" 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 we don't blurt out words we will regret later. Be sure to plan your approach in a nonaccusatory manner and think before you speak. Try a tactic such as, "Chloe, I've noticed lately we seem to be having a few issues. What thoughts do you have that might help us get back on track?" When possible, find alternatives to agree upon.

- Address the issue, rather than attacking the person. To accomplish this successfully, be prepared with facts, not gossip or rumors.

- Avoid assuming. Ask questions. Additionally, let the other person know how you perceive the matter. For example, you might say, "I'm concerned that the way your statement came across was a little curt. What were your thoughts in saying that the way you did?" Always be aware of your tone of voice and strive to keep an even tone.

- Avoid defensive body language. Be cognizant of your non-verbal cues — crossed arms, rolling of the eyes, heavy sighing and rigid posture. Give the other person your full attention, maintain good eye contact and keep from moving into their personal space.

- Be courteous and respectful. This helps defuse hostility. Furthermore, it is generally more effective to handle potential confrontational interactions 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 ..." is a tactic that gives the person with whom you are speaking a chance to confirm you've heard correctly, or to refine the message.

## Essential to handling challenging situations is to focus on what you can do to make it better.

In addition to using these eight strategies, you must also consider, or at least proceed on the premise, that a challenging co-worker may not change. Ultimately, you can only be responsible for your behavior and how you allow the behavior of others to impact you. This is crucial since the task you have in dealing with these individuals in the office is generally more about you than it is about them.

You are the one who is ultimately responsible for putting a stop to the behavior that upsets you. In the end, when you deal effectively with challenging co-workers, the process in itself goes a long way to sustaining "harmony in your workplace."

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