

It's Not ME, It's YOU: Part II

Diffusing Difficult People

I've been known to compare difficult people with puzzles; big pictures we haven't yet figured out. It's pertinent to consider why certain people have a toxic effect on our relationships, both personal and professional. But the bottom line is that no matter the reason for behaving in a difficult manner, there are various ways to pacify a difficult situation.

Doctors of psychology suggest that we can salvage difficult relationships by learning about each other through perceptiveness, control of emotion and direct communication. Easier said than done, eh? In the event that you don't have time for therapy, try the following ideas for controlling your own environment and diffusing difficult situations:

- **Don't mirror body language.** Contrary to popular belief, you shouldn't copy or mimic each person you converse with. Should you encounter someone behaving in an aggressive or antagonistic way, you're better off diffusing the situation by maintaining a more calm and under control demeanor.
- **Never embarrass anyone** – Take them aside. Nothing comes off as more aggressive or thoughtless than embarrassing someone, especially in front of others; you give the impression of being insensitive and unable to negotiate. If you must confront or address an issue directly, take someone aside and do it in a mutually respectful neutral location so as to foster common ground.
- **Actively Problem Solving** keeps you thinking of finding a solution rather than the problem itself, diverting the mind into acting creatively rather than angrily. This tactic also allows you to shine as the respectful concerned one, the team player. This will serve to disarm the difficult person and provide you enough time to gain control.

- **Ask permission to take notes.** In the worst of awkward or seemingly hopeless situations it may make sense to document the conversation “for the record”. After all, imagine the effect on your verbal sparring partner when you announce that you find their information so important that you’ll be writing it down...and by the way, what is their name and employee#? People tend to become more careful with the way they argue, threaten or instigate when they fear having to explain their behavior, or worse...having proof of it.
- **Watch your body messaging** – Don’t move into personal space to prove an adamant point. If you tend to let stance and mannerisms (inclusive of the hands) take control when you speak, be sure to control what your action says. An aggressive form of communication can turn into a negotiation faux pas.
- **The Mediator** tactic is NEVER a bad idea. Whether at the office or sitting around a table of friends, asking for an unbiased opinion from a third party not only assists in squelching an impasse, but forces both parties to step outside of emotion and into a compromise.
- **Plan your day to limit negative people.** It’s about taking control of your schedule, not the difficult people. While it’s true that you likely can’t avoid Monday morning’s meeting with your boss, it might be wise, when and if you can control it, NOT to schedule lunch with your bag-o’downers-best-buddy on the same day. Limit your exposure to difficult people in a short timeframe, wherever you can since lengthy exposure to negativity threatens the survival of your positive attitude.
- **Above all, show respect. Listen.** There is no better diffuser of difficult traits than being heard and feeling understood. Most heated situations and strained relationships stem from the lack of an open connection. By human instinct, once we are “heard” we are less defensive and can better focus on the issue at hand.

Clearly not all situations will be caused by a lack of communication or solved by diffusing difficult or toxic types. It's our responsibility to remember four essential tidbits of knowledge; Don't take it personally, Remember that you ARE good at your job/life, Accept that you will never please everyone, and Be responsible for your own actions.

Be sure to catch an array of tips & tactics on recognizing difficult patterns, diffusing toxic people and rating your own stress triggers, all available on DVD for only \$10, visit www.SandySpadaro.com/resources .

About Sandy Spadaro:

As a published author, trainer and marketing advisor, Sandy Spadaro is an enthusiastic advocate of business growth, skills development and women's issues.

