

| Type of Difficult Person | Characteristics | Tactics |
|---|---|---|
| Hostile-aggressive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullies, overwhelms, and intimidates others • Throws tantrums • Criticizes and argues relentlessly • Believes there's only one way to handle a situation -- can't accept feedback • Reacts even more strongly to resistance from others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't panic. Stand up to the hostile. • Don't take it personally. • Give him/her time to run down (not too long -- they'll see it as a weakness) • Get his/her attention carefully (use name of person clearly and loudly) • Get him/her to sit down. • Avoid head-on fight (you'll be run over). • Show him/her you take him/her seriously by paraphrasing what he/she has said. |
| Wet Blanket | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses negativism. "It won't work," or "We tried that last year." (not the same as one who carefully figures out alternatives.) • Feels those in power don't care or are self-serving. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't argue. • State your own realistic optimism. • Don't rush into proposing solutions. • Set a "horror floor." (What's the worst thing that could happen?) • Be ready to take action on your own. |
| Know-it-all | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feels and exerts the impressive of absolute certainty, power, and authority • Is usually right • Cannot be dissuaded once on a course. • Treats others as irrelevant. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your homework. • Question firmly but don't confront. • Present alternatives as detours. • Avoid being a counter-expert. |
| Balloon | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaks with great authority about subjects about which he/she has little knowledge; pretends to be an expert • Often only partially aware he/she is speaking beyond their knowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State facts as an alternative version. • Give balloon a way out (in private, if possible) |
| Staller | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is pleasant and supportive, but avoids decision making until the decision is made for him/her. • Hints and beats around the bush as a compromise between being honest and not hurting someone. • Quality-oriented, can't let go of something until it's perfect--which means never. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get him/her to describe the plan in detail. • Rank alternatives. • Link plan to values of quality and service. • Give support after decision is made. • Follow up. |
| Complainer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts self-righteous, blames and accuses others. • Makes no effort to solve problem (feels powerless) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen attentively. • Switch to problem-solving -- what would happen if ... "What's the first step?" • Paraphrase -- define the problem. |
| Clam | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses monosyllables or silence (clamming up) to avoid conflict ... nonresponsive • May feel he/she has been backed into a corner. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask open-ended questions. • Use a friendly stare until clam responds. • Comment on what's happening ("Our meeting seems to be at an impasse.") |
| Super Agreeable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is often personable, funny, outgoing. • Tells you what you want to hear, but lets you down in a crisis. • Commits to actions they won't or can't follow through on -- to stay on "good terms" with others. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let him/her know you value him/her as a person by telling him/her directly. • Compromise/negotiate if conflict arises. • Get his/her commitments in writing. • Follow through. • Be prepared to take action on your own. |
| Deadwood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't contribute anything to the actual team effort. • Is often in a power position. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand why the person is there -- he/she may occupy a role position in the formal power structure that is important to the smooth functioning of the informal power system. • Try assertiveness if the person becomes difficult. |
| One Who Takes All the Credit (Plagiarist) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steals credit for others' achievements, ideas, roles, organizational abilities, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confront the plagiarist in front of a mutually respected third party. • Emphasize the team effort, if applicable. • For written material, send additional copies of it, with your name on it, to people higher than the plagiarist. |