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Why must they be so difficult?

All of us can be difficult to deal with if the situation is right. Of course there are people who have made a life work of being difficult. For most of them it is their habitual response to an unfulfilled, or unsatisfied life. The best example is the child who acts up to gain attention from anyone, someone, please notice me, even if it's to yell at me.

Difficult adults have found one method of coping with the stresses of life. They whine, explode, or withdrawal into silence. You can be sure, they have practiced, and practiced and practiced, and are very good at using their favorite method. The skilled communicator can spot these methods, and has a predetermined set of tactics that they are ready to draw on to try to counter the difficult attitudes.

Most children, even adolescents have not yet firmly established a single method of meeting the dangers of the world. However, for many, their world-view is still naturally self-centered, so the techniques you might use with a difficult adult may still work on children. Just be prepared for them to change tactics on you, if they find that their current method is not getting them the outcome they desire.

Also remember that, depending on their developmental level, you may not be able to expect abstract thought or the ability to view a situation from several angles. These things come (for most people) with physical and social development. The really difficult people are those who never grow up!

Bottom line: What do people want?

- To be valued
- To be loved
- To be safe
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- To be fairly treated
- To have purpose
- To have input

Why are people so difficult?

Sometimes it pays to try to figure out why someone is “being difficult.” You may find that the attitude is a symptom of something else. If you help address the cause, the attitude may vanish.

- They are too busy to get it all done.
- They believe they are dealing with a moral issue or have theological reasons for taking an unmovable position.
- Fear of the unknown, lack of exposure to options, or are truly narrow minded.
- They have risen to their level of incompetence. (*The Peter Principle*)
- They are unorganized and are frustrated by the troubles that brings.
- They failed to plan, out of laziness or business, and may be looking for a way out or someone to carry the blame.
- They are unable to separate personal issues from club issues.
- They are still seeking attention or simply want it done their way.
- They are insecure.
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But an evil spirit came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the harp, Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear; but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall.

—I SAMUEL 19: 9, 10 NIV

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

—PROV. 16:24 NIV

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

—PROV. 16:32 NIV

Difficult!? Did you say difficult!?

Difficult people are people who do what you don't want them to do, do what you don't want them to do, leaving you not knowing what to do.



You have four choices when dealing with a difficult person

1. **Stay and deal with them.**
This may mean ignoring them, putting up with them, or using duct tape.
2. **Stay and change your tactics.**
This means being willing to change the way you deal with them, so that you can break through the attitude.
3. **Leave.** In some cases, it may not be worth your time and effort to alter the situation.
4. **Make them leave.** In other cases, you may have to stay, and find a way of making them leave! (There are clubs where the staff are such chronic complainers, that firing them is the only practical solution. Yes, you can fire volunteers!)

Connecting with people

According to Albert Morovian, a UCLA researcher during the mid 1960's, the majority of communication is nonverbal. He found that people "hear" 55% of message from body language, 38% from the sound, and only 7% from the actual words. That means that over 90% of a message is transmitted by non-verbal stimuli.

This would explain why face-to-face meetings give a clearer message, than phone calls (which have no body language) and e-mails or letters (which have no body language or sound!)

The Bible provides us with a setting that helps us connect in our communications with others. It uses a shared body language to make that critical, huge first connection. That setting is sharing a meal. Many cultures still find that meeting new people, or dealing with difficult ones is made easier by sharing a meal with them. We assume the same body posture, we use the same motions, make similar exclamations, and by doing so, build common ground.

Body Language

This is the key. We intuitively know when the words we are hearing match, or contradict the message a persons body is sending. For most of us, crossed arms signal hesitancy, closure, or resistance. Leaning forward shows attention and interest.

Beware though, the body language of one culture can be very different from another. In the U.S. you are expected to look someone in the eye, when you are being candid and direct, but in other cultures it indicates an attack.

In truth, we each have our own body language, and you have to spend time with someone to learn their language. You will save yourself a lot of grief if you are careful to resist jumping to conclusions about the body language of someone you are just getting to know.

Pacing

Eating together is a great way to build common ground. It is also a great example of a skill that, if applied judiciously, can break through to some of the most difficult people.

Next time you are in a restaurant, take a few minutes to observe happy groups at other tables. You will notice that group members share a similar posture. In fact, if you watch a group long enough, you will find that when one member takes a sip of water, others will frequently do the same. If one leans back it satisfaction, others will also. (You can also spot tables where there is conflict. Dissimilar postures are a clear indicator of strife.)

When consciously applied to increase connection, this phenomena of mimicking is call pacing. Think of it as a very mild form of that annoying childhood game. In normal situations it is subliminal. However, you can do it knowingly.

One of the strongest pacing techniques is to pick up the rhythm of someone's breathing or heartbeat. You might gently move a finger in time to their breath, or nod your head or wave a foot. The point is that you want to build commonality, and this is doing so at a very basic level.

Sound

Three aspects of sound affect our understanding.

Our tone indicates whether we are angry, interested, or afraid. Listen to the tone your children use, and you will hear yourself!

Tempo, or the speed and cadence we use in our communication can greatly add to the urgency or importance of a message.

And of course volume says a lot. In club leadership it is critical that you be able to project your voice over the storm of chatter without sounding angry. One way to do this is to make sure that you are smiling when you project your voice. This will make it loud without its sounding like a “yell.”

Verbal

Now the words we use may only present 7% of our message, but it is a critical 7%. It helps if you speak the same language. Just remember we each have our own understanding of our “common” language.

Backtracking

When it is critical that you understand, or when you know that there is a history of misunderstanding, you should make use of backtracking. To backtrack, you repeat back to a person exactly what you heard, using their same words. This assures them that you actually heard them, and confirms to you that you heard the entire message. Do not paraphrase.

Clarify

After they have acknowledged the accuracy of your backtrack, then you state how you interrupt the message. This is a paraphrase. For instance you might say, “So you are asking me to take over complete control and coordination of the class work for next meeting.” They will then confirm or correct your interpretation.

Other hints to avoid conflict

State your intent before you give your message! Why are you going to say what you are going to say? What do you hope to accomplish by doing so? This will often make your listeners much more receptive.

When possible, give your criteria. Explain what measurements you are using. Are you saying what you are saying because of time constraints, or finances, or its social impact.

Stating your intent and the criteria you are using, will greatly reduce conflicts during staff meetings.

To reduce conflicts with parents and club members, be prepared to give written communication in a timely manner. Many difficulties arise when people do not have the information they need.

Remember to start every staff meeting, club meeting or appointment with prayer. And if you know you are dealing with a difficult person, make sure you pray beforehand. You have God’s assurance that it will work out

How do I plan ahead to present an idea or issue when I expect to meet resistance?

1. **Know what you want.** Most of us go into a conversation or meeting without having a clear picture in our minds of what we want or how we are going to behave. Plan ahead.
2. **Pay close attention to the underlying statements.** Often we miss the message because we are too busy hearing the words, or preparing our response.
3. **Stay focused.** Don't get led astray. You know what you want, don't be sidetracked into an argument pattern.
4. **Be flexible.** Watch for unexpected opportunities for a win-win situation.

Club leadership and their types

In an unscientific survey of around 100 Pathfinder leaders attending a seminar, 47% admitted to being “The bossy type.” 33% went with analytic, 12% were entertainers, and only 8% claimed to be people people.

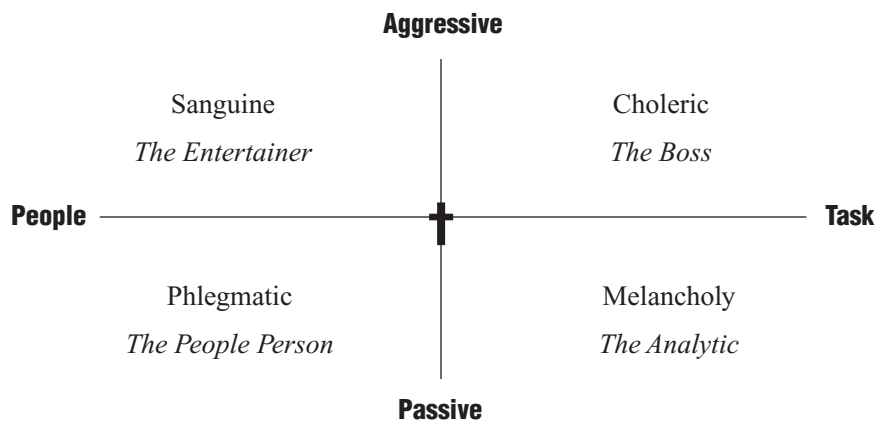
So... if you have lots of boss types in your club, you may have some challenges on getting analytic work done. Or more likely you may be ignoring the personal needs of the children, and focusing on the program and getting things done.

The four personality types

One of the more common systems for looking at, and studying human behavior is to use two scales for measuring how people relate. These scales are an individual's tendency to be task vs. people in orientation, and their aggressive vs. passive way of dealing with the task or person. By using these two scales as axis' on a chart, we can begin to plot major personality types.

The four sectors defined by the two axis' are given numerous names, so we will use both the technical name, and a more common name that you may find easier to relate too.

Most people actually have traits that would make them fall into several sectors, so for the sake of illustration we will consider the sector where are strongest tendencies lie.



It may help to actually picture yourself on this grid. You're not just in a quadrant, you are in a specific spot in the quadrant, and everyone you deal with is also in a specific spot in a specific quadrant.

If you find yourself the ultimate boss, sitting way up in the upper left corner, you will find that you have lots of difficulty dealing with someone who exists in the far lower right corner of the phlegmatic section. You will have less trouble with analytics, because they are task oriented just like you. You will also have less trouble with entertainers, because they can be as aggressive as you.

But if you are truly in the far upper left corner, you will find that you also have difficulty with people who have your same tendencies, but at a far lower level. On the grid, they are closer to the cross, closer to the phlegmatics.

The best communicators and the best leaders can move around the grid. They can adjust their thinking, and interpersonal skills to deal with people from all quadrants. In general, they move to the center of the cross!

Tactics for dealing with difficult people

Each personality type has it's difficult people. Find the one you are dealing with, and practice your exchange using the tactics outlined below.

Choleric/Boss

The Steamroller: Hostile and aggressive, they will run right over you. Will often be heard saying, "Just let me do it."

1. Stand your ground, both physically, and mentally. Steamrollers respect strength. Remember they see this as getting things done, even though it sounds like a hurricane to you.
2. You may have to interrupt if their tirade goes on to long.
3. Go for completion. Don't argue with them, just speak from your point of view. Remember they view you as weak. You must prove otherwise. Assertively, not aggressively.
4. Tell them, "You have interrupted, me, but you must allow me to finish so that you can get a firm grasp of the situation. I will gladly hear your points after you have listened to what I have to say."
5. Pace and backtrack. Establish common ground and make sure they know that you respect them and are looking out for their best interest.

The Sniper: Less blatant hostility. They use wisecracks and cutting remarks to take pot shots at you. Will often be heard saying, "What's the matter? Can't take a joke?" Most snipers feel that at some point you opposed them in something they were trying to do. Because they feel their authority was undermined, they will do the same to you.

1. When they insult you...DO NOT ignore it. Draw attention to it. If it is in a public setting, address it in a public setting.
2. Ask questions to find out what the issue is. Ask them what's going on. It may take a while to get to the real issue that's bothering them.
3. If it's in a public setting, ask if others in the group agree with the sniper attack. If possible, problem solve the issue right then and there.
4. If the setting does not allow it, or the Sniper refuses to deal with the hidden issue, refocus to the project at hand, and invite the group or club to support you in your intent to move forward.
5. If you get them out into the open, give them time to run it all out. Then speak from your own opinion, "In my opinion..."
6. If all else fails, leave.

Know-it-All: They are the experts and only their opinion counts. Often they really do know-it-all. In many cases their parents rewarded success and punished failure. To survive, they made sure they always knew what was right. Adventists are prone to this because they have "the truth." For them, there is only one way.

1. You must be knowledgeable on the subject they are being difficult over. Be prepared, but let them be the know-it-all.
2. Acknowledge their knowledge. Present items as thought you are seeking their wisdom. You are, but you are also trying to get them to see a different possibility.
3. Present your idea as a detour, not as something totally different. Use words like "perhaps", or "maybe we could consider."

Boss quick take

Bosses are bottom-line, get it done folk. They fear losing control, or wasting time, or disorder. They recognize that 80% of all decisions can be made immediately.

Favorite saying

"Come on, let's just get it done."

Care and feeding

- Give them at least some control.
- Give them a choice among several options.
- Make sure things actually happens. They hate meetings where nothing happens.

Analytic quick take

Analytic's are highly accurate, detail-oriented and precise. They love gadgets like computers and PIMMs. They are very hard to actually get a decision from. They fear being wrong. If you don't give them enough details, they will shut down. Change plans or throw curves at them and they will get angry. They revel in the 15% of decisions that must be researched.

Favorite saying

"We need to study this."

Care and feeding

- Give them as detailed and precise information as possible.
- Give them research tasks, not decision making tasks.
- Give them time to consider.

Entertainer quick take

Entertainers are people who are decisive, enthusiastic, performers. They want to be at the center of each and every event. They want prestige. They like to be the center of attention. They hate to be ignored and they hate to be teased in front of others.

Favorite saying

"Hey! I've got a great idea!"

Care and feeding

- Make sure you give them lost of recognition.
- Keep the pace moving.
- Be as upbeat as possible.
- Entertainers are the most apt to walk away from you. They will do this if they cannot regularly be the center of attention.

Melancholy/Analytic

Chronic Complainer: They are always whining, always finding fault, never finding solutions. They are unhappy with everything and everybody.

1. Listen to it all...let them go, they need to get this out.
2. Be prepared to interrupt and clarify their points, especially if they start repeating.
3. Find out how it often it happens.
4. Give them an assignment to track details on the issue. And prepare a report.
5. Find out if they have confronted the "offender," or to prepare a solution.
6. Offer to mediate a meeting. If they refuse, tell them to come back when they are ready to confront the issue.

The "No" person: They are negative and pessimistic. According to them, no plan or idea will ever work. Unfortunately, they really do believe it is this way. Scripture says, "As you believe, so shall it be." These people are very bitter and angry about something in life. Often you have little hope of changing them, so you have to deal with them or let them go. In club leadership, these are the volunteers you are most apt to have to fire.

1. Don't get dragged in. They are wet blankets. But you do not have to be that way. Remember the good times.
2. Don't argue. They are certain, they have experience it.
3. Take time to specify the issues. Find out the what, why and how of their reason for saying no. Find out if they have specific information on a situation similar to the one you are dealing with, or are they coloring everything with bile from one overpowering experience.
4. Before presenting a new idea, list all the possible "nos" and answer them. This may preempt their negative viewpoint.
5. Be prepared to go it alone if they refuse to move on. Make sure you are committed to moving ahead.

Sanguine/Entertainers

Tantrum throwers: Lookout for the explosive tantrums. If you ignore them or put down their ideas, their pressure builds until they blow up. They don't explode on purpose like a steamroller, these folk truly loose control.

1. Get their attention by saying something like, "What a great idea!" Then make sure they see your concern for their frustration.
2. Give them a chance to cool down and regain control of themselves. You can do this by suggesting the topic, or even the entire discussion be tabled for 10 minutes or so.
3. If possible, find out what triggered the explosion and assist them in problem solving that issue.

Think-they-know-it-all: Grand ideas built on sand. Beware, it's often quicksand. They really believe what they are saying. They do not think they are lying. They are playing one-ups-manship.

1. Do not buy into their hot air. Remember, they can be thin skinned, and filled with hot air.
2. Use "I" statements so you are not attacking them. "The way I see it..." If you attack their facts, they will just produce even more incredible info to support their point.
3. Make sure they can save face. Give them a way to escape from their own bad information. As soon as they find out that you really know what you are talking about, they will begin to backtrack.

Phlegmatic/People person

The Maybe Person: Can never make a decision because they don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. So often decisions are delayed until it causes real problems. They do not want others to be hurt, so they do not make decisions that might hurt someone.

1. Make it safe for them to be honest. Make sure they know your relationship will improve if they are honest with you.
2. Make sure you do have honest dialogue with them.
3. Problem solve any issue they raise, and help them problem solve. Give them time. Sit and talk, do not rush.
4. Prioritize alternatives.
5. Get them to leave the action steps in your hands.
6. Give lots of acknowledgment.

Sometimes they may have a problem with you! If so, make sure you find out, gently, gently, gently! Make sure they know you appreciate their input, even if its about you.

The Yes Person: They will always agree with everyone. This is different from the organizational yes person who is trying to gain status with a superior. They do not want to be hurt, so they avoid saying no to any one.

1. Make it safe for them to be honest. Reassure them that you will not be angry with them for their honesty.
2. Ask questions that will take them into the future, so they can see the result of their answers. You want them to see that saying yes to everyone will actually lead to the very conflict they are trying to avoid.
3. Find out if there is an underlying issue. If there is, problem solve.
4. Make sure they commit to keeping the honest communications coming.

People person quick take

These are sensitive people who want to be with people and be liked by them. They show great empathy. They hate confrontation. They want a smooth flow. Be insensitive to their feelings and they will become difficult.

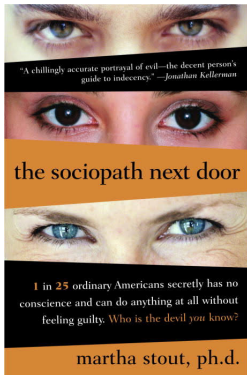
Favorite saying

"Sure. No problem, it'll work out."

Care and feeding

- Make sure they have time to get to know people.
- Regularly assure them that they are safe in speaking their mind.

*Be kinder than necessary,
for everyone you meet is fighting
some kind of battle.*



***The Sociopath Next Door* by Martha Stout. 256 pages. Publisher: Harmony. ISBN: 0767915828**

The Nothing Person:

These people do nothing and say nothing. Passives do it out of fear. Aggressives out of spite.

1. Let them know up front how much time you have for the conversation.
2. During that time, have an expectant attitude. Position yourself as though they are going to pop out with good stuff at any time.
3. Ask open ended questions. Avoid questions that can be answered with “Yes,” “No,” or a grunt. After several moments of silence, ask, “Could you explain that to me?” or “How are you feeling about this?”
4. Wait for their answer. No chit chat. As long as you are talking, they do not have to. Remember they really only have two options: Talk to you, or sit their in the awkward silence.
5. Comment on what has happened. “I have asked you two times what you are thinking about this. I ask again...”

They will usually start answering right before the time is up. DO NOT go beyond the time limit. Set another time to come back to the issue.

With passives, you must assure them, that they are safe and valued.

With aggressives (most children) you have to stay in control. They will questions, “Can I go now?” You respond by saying, “No, we are not finished.” You might use humor, really outrageous like, “You’re mad at me because two years ago I ate the last Little Debbie?”

Practice, Practice, Practice.

Many of the situations you will find yourself in, when dealing with difficult people, can be solved by prayerful requests for understanding. Consider the difficult people in your life and take time to learn the tactics outlined here, so that you may draw them near to the center of the cross.

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FOR GOD'S ARMY IN THE WORLD

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