

Dealing with difficult people takes practice

No one ever looked forward to dealing with a difficult person, whether it is an employee, customer or co-worker. But inevitably, problems arise and at some time, it will be your turn to address them. It is not only important that we deal with people in difficult situations, but we need to learn how to deal with people in general.

All employees should receive some kind of training in communication skills and it is helpful to keep a “tool box” of techniques you can use to address difficult situations. Here are a few of the tools from my toolbox:

- < **Step back from the situation.** Often, people think they need a quick comeback when faced with a difficult situation, or they make assumptions about the problem at hand. Take the time to step back and try to get the other person talking. Find out what their style of communication is and try to accommodate it. People forget that the person their facing isn't exactly like them, so take the time to find out as much as you can before you address the problem.
- < **If you can, practice your response.** When situations don't have to be dealt with on the spot, take the time to practice your response. Try to think like the other person. It's helpful to say things out loud so you hear what you could be saying to the other person. Anticipate their responses and adjust your delivery. Practice helps us make the mistakes beforehand and reduce misinterpretation once you are face-to-face.
- < **Stay in the “adult” mode.** There are three modes of communication – child, parent and adult. When dealing with conflict, it's important to stay in the adult mode. Don't act like a parent and be judgmental or a child and be defensive. Accept any responsibility that may be yours. Realize that it's okay to agree to disagree. Ultimately, if tempers begin to flare, realize that you may need to take a break and get back together later on.
- < **Try to find an agreement.** It is always helpful to find some agreement to the problem at hand; even if it's only that the problem exists. Coming to an agreement conveys understanding and works to move the conversation along. It can also be beneficial to speak in positive terms, by telling the person what you can do as opposed what you can't do.
- < **Communicate and explore alternatives.** Never assume that you can't help someone. By thinking about alternatives and offering suggestions about what you can do, you keep the conversation on a positive plane. You can also ask the person, “What would you like me to do?” Not only could you help solve their problem, but you might also find that what they want is less than you imagined.