

# Communication Guru™

Tips, best practices, and resources for effective communication



## Dealing with Difficult People

Difficult people come in two broad categories: aggressive and passive.

Aggressive people tend to be the intimidators or know-it-alls. They may demand attention, speak loudly, and interrupt and manipulate others. They can be confrontational, pointed, and angry. They place a high value on results and decisiveness, and their drive and fast pace may discourage teamwork and create a stressful work environment.

Passive people tend to be “yes” people and keep everything inside. They do not express their thoughts easily or quickly; at times it seems impossible to get an honest answer from them. They avoid tough decisions to spare people’s feelings. Over time, they may withdraw. As resentment builds beneath the surface, they may become passive-aggressive.

Within these two categories of people lie patterns of behaviors that make communication difficult. The overall strategy for dealing with difficult people is to gain control over your attitude toward the problem or person, accept them as they are, and address their behaviors using assertive communication strategies.

Assertive strategies for dealing with aggressive behaviors include:

1. Be calm, never argue or accuse; avoid “you” statements.
2. Don’t take their behavior personally.
3. State what you are observing: *Are you aware that you are yelling at me?*
4. Command respect: *I will not tolerate your abusive language.*
5. Use “I” statements: *I want a solution that we can both commit to.*

6. Ask open-ended questions: *How do you see your goal fitting in with our current strategy?*
7. Listen first to understand their position, then ask them to listen to you: *I’ve heard you and now I’d like you to hear me out.*

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Strategies for dealing with passive behaviors include:

1. Ask open-ended questions to draw them into a conversation. Avoid “why” questions as these provoke defensiveness.
2. Ask them for their ideas around a solution: *What other ways might we solve this problem?*
3. Make the communication environment safe for them to be honest.
4. Talk honestly and directly but avoiding blaming and shaming.
5. Use “I” statements: *I want a solution that we can both commit to.*
6. Be patient and persistent and show warmth and support.
7. Use a decision-making system to make it easier for passive people to make decisions.

The skill to deal with difficult people is all on your part. Ultimately, learning how to communicate effectively with difficult people will result in cooperation, collaboration, and win-win outcomes.

## ▼ Questions & Quandaries . . .

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