

## The Real World of Private Practice -- Working with Difficult People

Brian James Porteous, DC, QME

Difficult people come in a hundred varieties. In the world of chiropractic practice, they may be associates, employees or patients. The common denominator: It seems these people go out of their way to make your life miserable. The bottom line: you must find an effective way to work with people who are difficult to work with.

People are situationally difficult. People can be difficult depending on the situation they are in. It may be all the time or once in a while. Most difficult people don't even plan to be difficult. They simply lack effective interpersonal skills and have not been trained in building effective working relationships. Your best defense in working with a difficult person is a strong offense. Learn to identify and manage the difficult person (even if the difficult person is your patient).

Seven types of difficult people. Psychologist Robert M. Bramson, (author of Coping With Difficult People) couches his advice for working with difficult people in terms of coping.

I. Hostile-aggressive. This category of difficult people has a strong need to be right and in control. They indiscriminately try to roll over you to get things done "their way." These people expect you to retreat at their first advance. Instead, hold your ground. Wait them out, but show empathy. Approach the hostile-aggressive from this angle: "I can see this insurance situation is very important to you. It's important to me, too. I want to discuss it with you, but not this way."

II. Complainers. Chronic complainers never try to do anything about the source of their irritation. They constantly blame others for the problems they see all around them. Don't agree with the complainer. Acknowledge their complaints. Then ask them how they would resolve the situation.

III. Clams. Co-workers who are silent and unresponsive make work life difficult. Use open-ended questions and strong eye contact to encourage clams to open up.

IV. Super-agreeables. People in this category are so desperate to be liked they'll agree with everyone and everything. However, when the going gets tough you can never count on their support. Help this person feel safe to disagree by not placing him in the middle of a conflict. Encourage him to give his honest opinions on non-controversial projects.

V. Know-It-Alls. Genuine know-it-alls are expert, competent people who make plans and carry them out despite great obstacles. The problem is they have little need for other people. You can work most effectively with a genuine know-it-all by respecting his expertise and encourage him to teach you. Confront this type by questions such as, "What is your reasoning behind choosing alternative A over alternative B?"

VI. Bogus Know-It-Alls. Have an overwhelming need to be respected. Cope with them by presenting

your ideas or facts as an alternative set of possibilities for them to consider.

VII. Indecisives. These people won't let go until they feel 100% correct -- which means never. They are uncomfortable making decisions and taking charge. Deal with this type by asking for their ideas. Be careful not to overload them. Keep control of projects in your hands. If your office manager is indecisive, volunteer to take charge of projects and then ask for her input. Don't drop the project back in her lap.

If you work over, under or along side a difficult person, here are some things to remember:

Don't argue with a difficult person about her behavior or actions. Instead, tell her how you feel when she talks to you or treats you a certain way.

Don't speak poorly of a difficult person behind her back. This behavior makes your situation worse. Be positive and try to learn from your situation.

More successful doctors have worked for or with difficult people at some time in their professional career. Take a close look at yourself if you find that everywhere you go, you're surrounded by difficult people. You are probably the difficult person. If you feel the only way to keep your sanity is to get away from working with a difficult person, decide to make a change and do it! A lousy marriage isn't any more fun at work than at home.

JUNE 1990