

## Lesson 23 Worksheet: Dealing with Difficult People

This worksheet will help you find creative new ways to deal with 'difficult' people, increasing your chances of getting the outcome you want, and reducing friction with those around you.

The worksheet follows the four-step process outlined in the lesson:

1. Stop thinking of them as 'difficult'.
2. Ask yourself 'What do I want them to *do* differently?'
3. Ask yourself '*What's in it for them* to do what I want?'
4. Tell them exactly what you want them to do differently, including what's in it for them.

**1. Stop thinking of them as 'difficult'.**

We often label people without even realizing it. So when you're feeling stuck in communicating with somebody, start by taking a 'mental inventory' of the labels you're applying to them:

- i. Write down all the words you can think of that describe this person – e.g. 'lazy', 'selfish', 'disruptive', 'inconsiderate'.
- ii. Now cross them all out. And never use them again about this person.
- iii. If you ever catch yourself using these words about the other person, stop and mentally cross them out again.

## **2. Ask yourself ‘What do I want them to *do* differently?’**

Remember, you don’t need to change their personality – just influence their behaviour.

At this stage you’re not actually talking to the other person, just thinking about what to say to them that will get the best outcome. If it helps, write down several alternatives.

### ***(a) Be specific***

Avoid vague requests like these:

“You should show me more respect.”

“We need to talk”

Instead, **be as specific as possible about what you want them to do.**

For example:

“When we’re presenting to the client, please don’t interrupt or contradict me.”

If you’re finding it hard to come up with a specific request, use what therapist Bill O’Hanlon calls ‘videotalk’ – imagine you can see the person on a video screen, what do you see them do and what do you hear them say? Use this as the basis of your request.

### ***(b) Identify what you don’t want AND what you want***

If you just tell them what you don’t want, it sounds like a complaint, and the other person will just get defensive.

But if you follow up your description of what you don’t want with your desired alternative, they have the option of accepting your request – or proposing an alternative.

For example:

“When we’re presenting to the client, please don’t interrupt or contradict me. If you disagree, talk to me about it afterwards.”

**3. Ask yourself ‘What’s in it for them to do what I want?’**

***(a) Put yourself in their shoes***

This is easier said than done! But start from the assumption that everything they do and say makes complete sense, and ask yourself:

- How would I have to be feeling to be doing what they are doing?
- What would I have to be thinking to act like that?

***(b) What’s in it for them?***

Now try to identify the other person’s priorities – what they are focused on achieving or gaining, that makes them blind to your requests. This is the ‘What’s in it for them?’ (WIIFT) that you need to identify if you are to influence them.

To help you, here are some common WIIFT factors:

- Recognition
- Security
- Authenticity
- Knowledge
- Interesting work
- Money
- Achievement
- Appreciation
- Control
- Status
- Convenience

**4. Tell them exactly what you want them to do differently, including what's in it for them (WIIFT).**

This is where you put it all together, telling them **exactly what you want them to do**, and **what's in it for them**.

***(a) Appeal to their self-interest***

The basic formula for making an influential appeal is: **Specific request + WIIFM**

Here's the example from the lesson:

“Hi John, I'm getting the message from your phone calls and emails that I'm not keeping you sufficiently in the loop about the project's progress. I realise how important it is for you to be up to speed on the latest developments **[WIIFT]**, so I'd like to suggest we do a phone call at 5pm each day, where I can update you and respond to any issues that have come up during the day **[specific request]**.”

You should also include a **specific promise** of what you will do to give them what they want:

I know you want the project to move forward as quickly as possible **[WIIFT]**, so if it's OK with you I'll respond to any queries during the phone call at the end of the day **[specific promise]**. That way I get the work done for you faster, and we'll also be more efficient dealing with all the queries in one go **[WIIFT]**.

***(b) Use negative consequences for extra leverage***

Sometimes a WIIFT isn't enough – you need to make it clear that the other person will get a much worse outcome by carrying on as they are.

Here the basic formula is: **Specific unwanted action + negative consequence**

For example:

I understand how concerned you are to get a quick response and to get problems fixed ASAP **[concern]**. But the trouble with trying to respond to every query instantly is that it breaks my concentration – which as you know, is essential for providing you with my best work **[negative consequence]**. It also means we're less efficient at dealing with queries if we keep stopping and starting to do them one-

by-one [**negative consequence**].

Net net: If we carry on as we are, the job will take longer, cost you more, and could have a negative impact on quality [**negative consequences**].

Two points to bear in mind when using negative consequences:

- Make sure it's a negative consequence that's meaningful to *them*. Beware of explaining negative consequences that affect you (or others) more than them!
- If you sound too threatening, you risk alienating the other person. Sometimes it's more effective to position the 'threat' as something beyond your control. ("I wish I could change it, but I can't... it's just the way things are likely to turn out.")
- End on a positive note – by restating your desired alternative and the WIIFT to change.

### ***(c) Rehearse with a friend***

If it's a really tricky or important situation, it's worth rehearsing the conversation with a friend first.

Go through the four-step process with your friend, and at the final stage, get him/her to role-play the other person as you rehearse the conversation.

Ask them to give you feedback on how your words are coming across, and practise alternative phrasings until you're confident your message is coming across the way you want, before you have the conversation for real.