



Managing Difficult People



One View of Humans

“What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties...”

--William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*



What Shakespeare Didn't Know

- Not everyone plays nice
- 80/20 rule
 - 80% of the problems are caused by 20% of the people
- The 20% are often toxic personalities



The Toxic Personality

- A toxic person is someone who exhibits a pattern of destructive work behaviors that weaken/harm individuals, teams and organizations, and communities
- Know anyone who fits the description?



Toxic Personalities Are Everywhere

- 64% of employees in one study reported currently working with a toxic person
- 94% reported that they had worked with a toxic person at some time in their work life
- Toxic behavior is hard to change because it is learned early and is often rewarded
- Many toxic people believe they are **entitled** to behave badly toward public officials

Recognizing a Toxic Employee

“Toxic” people come in all shapes and sizes

- **Tyrants** use their position to treat others in a high-handed, harsh and dictatorial manner
 - Stop accepting the situation. If you do nothing, it will only continue.
 - Appear firm, strong, and unemotional. If you reveal anger or weakness, the tyrant only tries harder to dominate. Stay calm in the face of anger.
- **Bullies** are habitually cruel to those who believe they can control through fear
 - Don't let the bully get away with acting this way with you or others. Doing so only reinforces their behavior.
 - Deal with the issue without getting made or criticizing the person, but don't be afraid to confront their behavior. Always show the person respect.

- 
- **Intimidators** try to get you on their side by implying they can hurt or embarrass you.
 - Rehearse how you will talk to them.
 - Make yourself appear poised and calm.
 - Laugh them off (“You can’t be serious”).
 - **Snipers** take shots at you as well as what you do. They frequently act in private or treat their jabs as jokes when they take after you in public.
 - Don’t let them get away with it,
 - Keep your tone light, but make sure your message is crystal clear.
 - Confront them in private, making sure they know you know what they’re doing.

- 
- **Back-Stabbers** pretend to be your friend in public, but attack or criticize you in private.
 - Confront back-stabbers in private.
 - Back-stabbers will frequently deny what they've said, Give them a graceful way out, but make sure they know you know what they did.
 - **Wet blankets** are always negative, throwing cold water on every new idea or initiative. They are convinced that nothing can be done to fix a problem.
 - Do your homework and have all the facts ready to demonstrate your new idea can work.
 - Provide context and alternative solutions before making your recommended solution.
 - Stay positive and optimistic.
 - Modify your proposal if necessary to win support of the group

- 
- **Hotheads** are scrappers who start fights at the drop of a hat. When hotheads can't deal with frustration, they can become belligerent. They don't always take their anger out on the people who've made them angry.
 - Help hotheads to articulate the real source of their anger.
 - Don't confront them immediately, but give them a chance to cool off.
 - Adopt a problem solving style, but don't play referee.
 - **Blockers** only like their own ideas. They stop progress on your plans because only they can be relied to come up with a good solution.
 - Offer your ideas as suggestions rather than demands.
 - Involve the blocker in the process.
 - Be well prepared for your presentation and be ready to defend yourself.

- 
- **Rumor mongers** are gossips who tell everyone they know everything they know and some things they've just made up
 - Keep your eyes and ears open
 - Check the facts before acting
 - Challenge the rumor monger to provide evidence
 - Cut short inappropriate conversations or discussions and get back on track



Summing Up

- Be brave
- Don't let them get away with it
- Stand up for yourself and others
- Keep your cool

“Never get mad, never make a threat, reason together” (Don Corleone, the Godfather)