



BITE-SIZED CAREER STRATEGIES

Dealing With Difficult People

Unfortunately, the chances are that we will all run into difficult colleagues. Some just get under our skin for various reasons; others seem to go out of their way to be difficult. Here are some strategies to help you work more effectively with peers.

When dealing with difficult people who seem to go out of their way to undermine us, be unpleasant, or just make things challenging, the first thing to do is to always stay calm. There is nothing to gain by escalating matters and arguing back.

Here are some other tips:

- Use “I” statements to let your colleague know how you felt and how their actions affected you. “I didn’t like...” or “I felt...”
- Keep it respectful and your emotions in check. This is not the time to try and match your colleague’s behavior. Take a deep breath or count to 10 before responding.
- Tell them what you want. Respectfully and assertively state what you want. “Going forward, I would like...”
- Try to problem-solve together. Be open to the fact that professional disagreements happen and that others may have legitimately different approaches and views. That does not mean they should be disrespectful of your views — or vice versa! And if you are in an open floor plan, you may want to take your discussion to a conference room or other location where you won’t be overheard.
- If you cannot make progress on your own, consider discussing the difficulties with your supervisor. Do not gossip about or share your difficulties with other colleagues. And don’t “diagnose” your colleague; you are not a therapist.
- Consider limiting your interactions; use email rather than personal interactions, if possible. Try to include others in meetings so you are not alone.
- Don’t forget to manage your own stress. Dealing with difficult colleagues is stressful. Go for a short walk, get coffee, or use other strategies as a personal reward for working through difficult interactions.

Remember, while you cannot control how other people treat you, you can control your own response. Ignore personal attacks, keep your emotions in check, use I statements, and follow a few of the tips above.



Nancy Segal
www.solutions-workplace.com
[linkedin.com/in/nancysegal](https://www.linkedin.com/in/nancysegal)



Ellen Steverson
www.StartingBlockCS.com
[linkedin.com/in/ellensteverson](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ellensteverson)