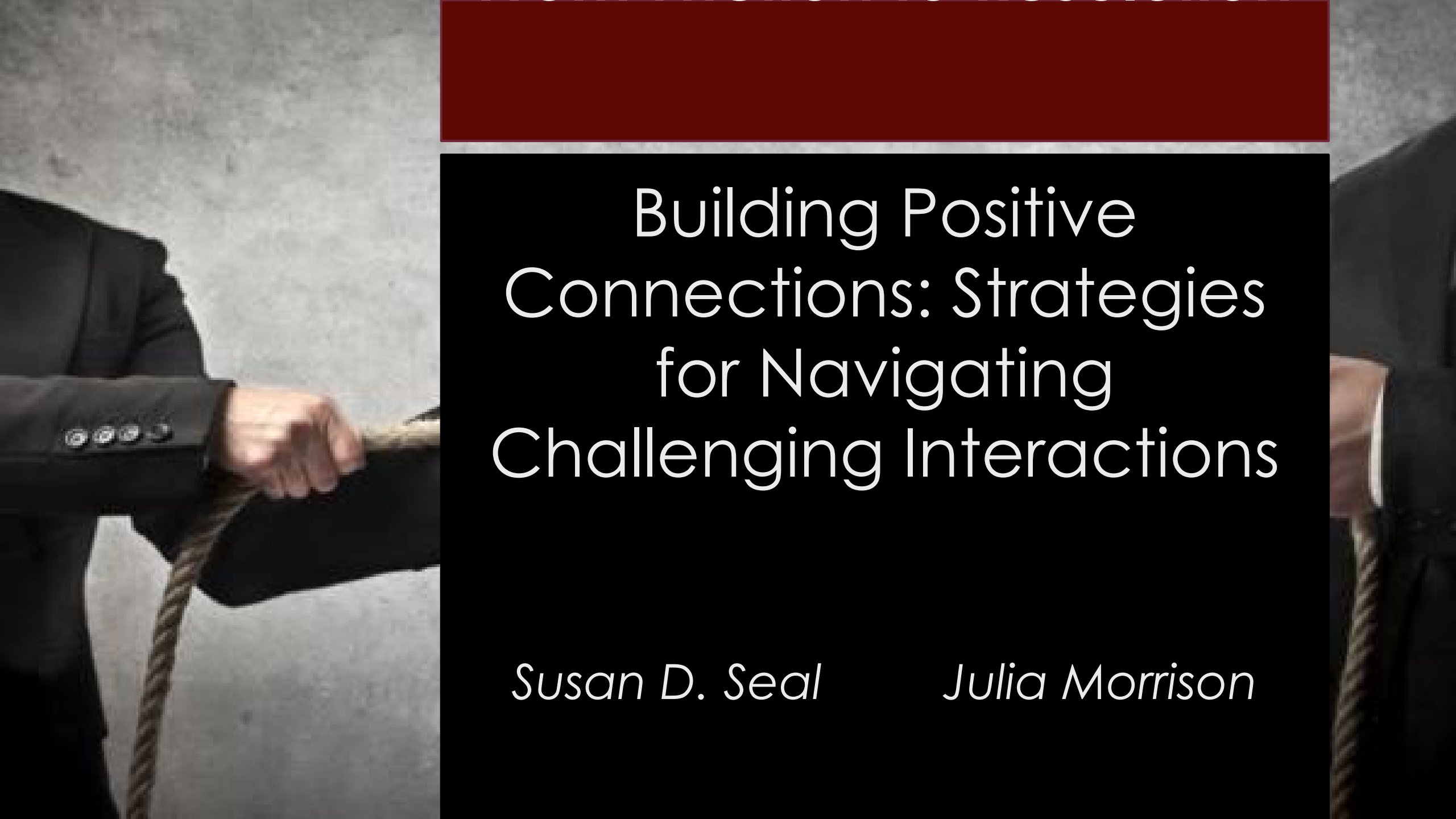




Building Positive Connections: Strategies for Navigating Challenging Interactions

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Difficult Interactions

Situational factors

Mismatched communication styles

Unmet needs or feeling unheard

Different values or priorities

Personality differences

Dealing with Difficult Personalities at Work



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Reality Check

In an ideal world, we would all work alongside people who are supportive, collaborative, and easy to communicate with.

The truth is, every workplace has challenging personalities – colleagues, supervisors, even direct reports.



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The Truth About Workplace Personalities

- Challenging colleagues are a top cause of stress, disengagement, and turnover in the workplace.
- Personality clashes often stem from miscommunication, lack of self-awareness, or unmet needs.
- Our goal is to learn how to work **with** difficult personalities rather than against them.



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Let's Talk About It

In small groups, think about a difficult personality you've worked with – a peer, supervisor, or direct report.

What behaviors made it hard to work with this person?

How did you (or could you have) managed it more effectively?



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Let's Meet Some Personalities



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The Control Freak



- The *Control Freak* colleague struggles to let go of responsibility. They refuse to delegate, hovering over others and monitoring every detail of the work.
- Instructions often come over-explained, with every step spelled out as if you can't be trusted to figure it out on your own.
- They ask for constant updates, questioning progress even when there's no reason to worry.
- Skeptical of other people's approaches, they insist that their way is the only way, often positioning themselves as the main point of contact for everything.
- This leaves teammates feeling micromanaged and stifled, rather than empowered to contribute independently.



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Strategies for Dealing with the Control Freak

1. Set Clear Boundaries (Respectfully)

- Agree upfront on roles and deliverables so expectations are transparent.
- Use phrases like:
- *“Just to confirm, I’ll handle X and update you by Friday.”*
- This reduces their urge to hover since you’ve set a clear accountability point.

2. Provide Proactive Updates

- Control freaks often micromanage because they fear being out of the loop.
- Send short, regular check-ins before they have to ask.
- Example: A quick email or message: *“Just a heads-up: I’ve completed the draft, and the final will be ready tomorrow.”*

3. Reframe Their Demands as Collaboration

- Instead of resisting their oversight, redirect it.
- *“I’d like to incorporate your expertise on the final review — but let me take the first pass independently.”*
- Positions them as a resource, not a roadblock.



Strategies for Dealing with the Control Freak

4. Focus on Deliverables, Not Process

- Acknowledge that they may want tasks done a certain way, but redirect back to outcomes.
- *“I hear that you’d like more detail in step two — my approach will get us the same result in less time. Let’s try it and compare.”*

5. Ask Clarifying Questions

- Sometimes their behavior comes from fear of mistakes.
- Use curiosity to get to the root:
 - *“Are there parts of this project where you feel extra detail is critical?”*
 - *“What’s most important for you in the final outcome?”*

6. Know When to Escalate

- If their behavior becomes obstructive, sabotages efficiency, or damages morale, escalate diplomatically:
- Frame it around *team productivity* rather than personality.
- Example: *“We’re missing deadlines because review cycles are too long. Can we streamline this?”*



The Disengaged Colleague

- This colleague often feels like they've vanished from the team, even when they're physically present.
- They rarely respond to emails or messages, avoid meetings when possible, and contribute little when they do attend.
- Deadlines slip by because they're not paying attention or don't feel accountable, and when pressed, they may deflect responsibility onto others.
- Their lack of energy and involvement leaves teammates feeling unsupported, as though they're carrying more than their fair share of the workload.
- Over time, their absence — whether physical or mental — erodes trust and collaboration, creating frustration for everyone else who is trying to move the work forward.



Strategies for Dealing with the Disengaged Colleague

1. Clarify Expectations Up Front

- Disengaged colleagues often “check out” when roles aren’t clear.
- Be specific about who owns which task, deadlines, and standards.
- Use tools like shared project trackers or meeting notes to lock in accountability.

2. Increase Accountability

- Ask them directly to commit: *“Can you confirm you’ll handle the data pull by Wednesday?”*
- Follow up commitments in writing (email, task list) to create visibility.
- Consider pairing them with an accountability partner or rotating task ownership within the team.

3. Offer Support (but Don’t Enable)

- Sometimes disengagement masks burnout, lack of confidence, or personal struggles.
- Check in privately: *“I’ve noticed you seem less engaged lately — is there something making it difficult to contribute?”*
- If it’s a skill gap or workload issue, brainstorm solutions. If it’s chronic disinterest, shift to accountability.



Strategies for Dealing with the Disengaged Colleague

4. Create Shared Wins

- Invite them into small, visible contributions that matter:
 - Leading a small agenda item.
 - Delivering a piece of a project that gets recognition.
- Positive reinforcement can help re-engage without overwhelming.

5. Model Engagement

- Stay consistent with your own responsiveness and follow-through.
- Demonstrating reliability and energy sets a standard and removes excuses for “checking out.”

6. Protect the Team

- If disengagement continues, don’t let the rest of the team carry hidden resentment.
- Be transparent about workload distribution so contributions (or lack thereof) are visible.
- Escalate only when repeated efforts fail, framing it around team performance and fairness rather than personal complaints.



The Over-Extender Colleague



- This colleague seems to live, breathe, and sleep work. They're the first to log on in the morning and the last to leave at night, sending emails at all hours, weekends included.
- They thrive on being busy and often measure their worth by how much they can juggle at once. While their drive can be admirable, they tend to create pressure for everyone else to keep up with their pace and may have a short fuse from being overworked.
- They may unintentionally make teammates feel guilty for taking time off or setting healthy boundaries.
- Over time, their "always-on" behavior can create unrealistic expectations and foster burnout across the team.



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Strategies for Dealing with the Over-Extender Colleague

1. Respect Their Drive, but Protect Your Boundaries

- Acknowledge their commitment without adopting their habits.
- Normalize healthy practices by modeling balance: *“I’ll pick this up first thing Monday”* instead of responding late at night.

2. Set Clear Availability Expectations

- Let them know when you’re reachable and when you’re not.
- Use shared calendars or status indicators to communicate boundaries.
- If they email at odd hours, reply during work time to reinforce norms.

3. Negotiate Timelines Instead of Accepting Them

- Over-extenders often underestimate workload or over-promise.
- When given a rushed deadline, reframe: *“I can complete this by Wednesday — will that still meet the project needs?”*



Strategies for Dealing with the Over-Extender Colleague

4. Don't Internalize Their Pace as Your Standard

- Remind yourself: their overwork is a choice, not a mandate.
- Avoid comparing your worth or productivity to theirs.
- Encourage discussions about workload balance in team settings to prevent guilt-driven overextension.

5. Redirect Collaboration into Healthy Channels

- Suggest structured check-ins instead of constant after-hours pings.
- Keep conversations focused on deliverables, not “who works harder.”
- Reinforce efficiency and quality over sheer hours logged.

6. Offer Gentle Reality Checks

- Sometimes, over-extenders don't realize the impact of their behavior.
- Try: *“I noticed you’ve been online late every night — are you okay? Is there a way we can spread the workload?”*
- This opens the door for honest conversation without judgment.



The Chaos Coordinator



- This colleague seems to thrive on chaos. Every issue becomes an emergency, every disagreement turns into conflict, and they often stir the pot just enough to keep everyone slightly on edge.
- They feed off the energy of urgency and drama, mistaking it for productivity. As a result, projects can feel directionless, priorities shift constantly, and teammates are left feeling drained, anxious, or even resentful.
- Instead of helping work move forward, this colleague's need for intensity often creates unnecessary tension, confusion, and distraction.



Strategies for Dealing with the Chaos Coordinator

1. Stick to Facts, Not Feelings

- Avoid getting swept into their emotional tone.
- Redirect conversations to objective details: *“Here’s what we know, here’s what we need to decide.”*

2. Set and Reinforce Priorities

- When they shift focus to the “crisis of the day,” return to agreed-upon priorities.
- *“I hear this is urgent, but we committed to finishing the report by Friday. Let’s stay on track.”*

3. Keep Interactions Brief and Structured

- Drama generators often dominate time with tangents or exaggerated stories.
- Use concise agendas and clear timelines for meetings.
- Politely steer back: *“Let’s focus on what needs to be done today.”*



Strategies for Dealing with the Chaos Coordinator

4. Don't Fuel the Fire

- Avoid gossip, side conversations, or feeding into theatrics.
- Respond calmly and with neutral language, even if they're agitated.
- Your composure helps deflate their energy rather than escalate it.

5. Be a Problem-Solver, Not a Spectator

- Shift the dynamic from reacting to fixing.
- *"Okay, this seems disruptive — here are two possible solutions. Which should we try?"*
- Keeps focus on resolution instead of lingering on drama.

6. Protect Your Energy

- Recognize that constant chaos can wear you down.
- Build in breaks, lean on calm teammates, and set limits on engagement.
- If needed, escalate to a manager by framing it as a *workflow issue* rather than a personality problem.



The Unsure Colleague



- This colleague struggles with confidence in their role. They hesitate to make decisions, second-guess themselves, or swing the other way — trying to control everything to cover their insecurity.
- Their contributions can feel scattered, because they attempt to solve too many problems at once without a clear plan.
- At times, they may come across as overly authoritative, mistaking rigidity for competence.
- While their intentions are rarely malicious, their lack of experience or self-assurance often slows down teamwork, creates confusion, or leaves others to quietly pick up the slack.



Strategies for Dealing with the Unsure Colleague

1. Offer Encouragement Without Condescension

- Acknowledge what they're doing well: *"That was a solid idea you brought up in the meeting."*
- Positive reinforcement helps build confidence without making them feel patronized.

2. Model Decision-Making

- Demonstrate how to make choices with clarity and logic.
- *"Here are the two options, the pros/cons, and my recommendation — what do you think?"*
- Gives them a framework to follow instead of leaving them adrift.

3. Ask Clarifying Questions

- Their uncertainty often masks a lack of understanding.
- Use gentle prompts: *"What's your biggest concern with this approach?"* or *"Which part do you feel least confident about?"*
- Draws out what they actually need to move forward.



Strategies for Dealing with the Unsure Colleague

4. Provide Opportunities for Small Wins

- Suggest roles or tasks where they can contribute in visible, meaningful ways.
- When they succeed, it reinforces competence and reduces hesitation.

5. Share Knowledge and Context

- Sometimes inexperience stems from not knowing “how things work here.”
- Share organizational norms, past examples, or insider tips.
- Helps them feel included and lowers the learning curve.

6. Protect Team Momentum

- Be patient, but don't let indecision paralyze progress.
- If they stall, step in tactfully: *“Since we need to move forward, why don't I draft the first version and we'll review together?”*
- Keeps work on track while still valuing their input.



The Toxic Personality



- This colleague drains the energy from the workplace. They crave attention, take credit for others' work, and refuse to acknowledge mistakes.
- They lack empathy, often dismissing the feelings or contributions of teammates.
- When challenged, they may use anger, manipulation, or intimidation to maintain control.
- Policies and norms feel optional to them — they behave as though the rules don't apply.
- Over time, their behavior creates a hostile, distrustful environment where collaboration feels unsafe.
- The toxicity they generate doesn't just affect individual relationships — it poisons the entire team dynamic.



Strategies for Dealing with the Toxic Personality

1. Maintain Professionalism at All Costs

- Avoid mirroring their bad behavior, even when tempted.
- Keep your tone calm, neutral, and respectful — this protects your credibility.

2. Set Firm Boundaries

- Be clear about what behavior you will and will not accept.
- Example: *“I’m happy to discuss the project details, but I won’t continue this conversation if it becomes disrespectful.”*

3. Document Interactions

- Keep records of emails, meeting notes, and agreements.
- This creates accountability and protects you if issues escalate.



Strategies for Dealing with the Toxic Personality

4. Limit Engagement When Possible

- Minimize unnecessary interactions.
- Keep conversations brief and focused strictly on tasks or deliverables.
- Don't give them opportunities to manipulate or draw you into drama.

5. Build and Use Your Support Network

- Lean on trusted colleagues, mentors, or HR for perspective and reinforcement.
- Having allies reduces the isolation toxic personalities often create.

6. Know When to Escalate or Exit

- If the toxic behavior is persistent and damaging, seek support from leadership or HR.
- Frame the issue around team well-being and performance, not personal dislike.
- If there's no improvement and the environment becomes unbearable, prioritize your own health and explore exit strategies.



Working with Difficult Personalities

- Every workplace has a mix of personalities — some energizing, others draining.
- Difficult behaviors are often driven by insecurity, stress, or unmet needs.
- You can't change someone else's personality, but you *can* change how you respond.
- The goal is not to “fix” people, but to **protect your well-being, keep work on track, and maintain professionalism.**



Practical Takeaways

- **Stay Professional:** Don't mirror negative behaviors — hold your ground respectfully.
- **Set Boundaries:** Define what you can and cannot accept, and reinforce calmly.
- **Communicate Clearly:** Be proactive, concise, and solution-oriented.
- **Protect Yourself:** Document interactions, build support networks, and manage your energy.
- **Know When to Escalate:** If behavior harms the team or becomes toxic, seek help from leadership or HR



Reflection & Next Steps

Questions for You to Consider:

- Which personality type do you find most challenging?
- What strategies will you try in your next difficult interaction?
- How can you support colleagues who may also be dealing with these personalities?

Difficult personalities are part of every workplace — but with clear strategies, empathy, and boundaries, you can maintain professionalism, reduce conflict, and keep your team moving forward.



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When Dealing with Difficult Personalities Leads to Conflict

Conflict Type

- Task
- Process
- Relational
- Resource
- Value

Stages of Conflict

Latent Conflict
Conditions

Perceived Conflict
Cognition

Felt Conflict
Affect

Manifest Conflict
Behavior

Aftermath
Conditions



High

Importance of goal



Competing



Collaborating



Compromise



Avoiding



Accommodating

Low

Low

Importance of relationship

High

Destructive When

- ▶ **Hinders performance**
- ▶ **Affects morale**
- ▶ **Disrupts relationships**
- ▶ **Diverts resources**
- ▶ **Reduces quality**
- ▶ **Opens you up to litigation**



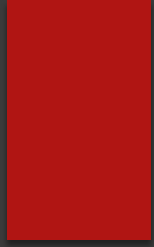
Constructive When

- **Produces new ideas**
- **Solves problems**
- **Provides opportunities for people to expand skills**
- **Fosters creativity**
- **Builds relationships**



Getting the Constructive Out of Conflict

- ▶ Change the way you think about it – new approach, new opportunity
- ▶ Show respect – ask questions, dig deeper, avoid “but”, get to know people
- ▶ Rely on data – take emotion out and look at data together
- ▶ Be self aware – what is behind your resistance? What are your biases?
- ▶ Avoid generalizations – Be specific, don’t make assumptions
- ▶ Seek understanding not necessarily total agreement – Balance needs



► What are potential constructive outcomes?

- New ideas
- Solution to problem
- Expand skills or creativity
- Build the relationship

► What is a first step that you can take?

- Change the way you think about it – new approach, new opportunity
- Show respect – ask questions, dig deeper, avoid “but”, get to know people
- Rely on data – take emotion out and look at data together
- Be self aware – what is behind your resistance? What are your biases?
- Avoid generalizations – Be specific, don’t make assumptions
- Seek understanding not necessarily total agreement – Balance needs

Questions?

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