

# Change Your Way To Health!



## How to improve a difficult work relationship

Today's workplace is a melting pot of people with different values, backgrounds, and cultures. It is inevitable that we will work with someone who challenges us. This can create difficulties at work... if we allow it.

When we struggle with a difficult co-worker relationship it can mean sleepless nights or frequent days off, and undoubtedly our productivity suffers. Life can be even more stressful if it's our boss we have issues with (see back page).

Some conflict is to be expected and it can be healthy if handled in the right way. But difficult situations such as being the target of malicious gossip, arguing with a co-worker, or not being given critical information can leave us emotionally drained and less able to work productively. We need to take steps to resolve conflict before it hurts us, or others, and before it has a negative impact on our workplace.

### Tips

**Assess the situation.** What you perceive to be an injustice may be a misunderstanding. Could there be another side to the story? Do you know for sure it's true? Is the situation one you can try to resolve on your own or should you seek help from your supervisor or Human Resources?

**Separate the person from the problem.** A person you may be experiencing difficulty with does not necessarily have bad intentions. Perhaps they are under extreme pressure at work or dealing with a stressful situation at home. Rather than seeing the person as "the problem", focus on the issue that needs to be addressed, not the behaviour of the individual.

**Discuss the issue.** If your difficulties with a co-worker are relatively minor, take the time to calm down and put the situation in perspective. Once you have organized your thoughts, ask your colleague if you can meet one-on-one to discuss what is happening. Listen to what they have to say before you respond. When you respond, remember to speak from your own perspective, and focus on your own experience.

**Focus on a common solution.** Let the person you are in conflict with know you want to create a win-win resolution. It may mean you need to make some compromises. Ask what he or she feels needs to change. Keep the focus on the greater goal.

**Accept that people are the way they are.** It rarely works when we try to change others. Understand your own strengths and weaknesses and find a way to handle the situation so it will result in a successful outcome for you. Maintain a positive mindset and focus your energy on the aspects of your life that you can control.



It's one thing to have difficulty with a co-worker and another to have difficulty with your supervisor or manager. Your boss decides what it is you will be working on and influences your status and future career options within your organization. Therefore, it's in your best interest to maintain a good relationship with your boss whenever possible. However, this does not mean remaining silent if the relationship is challenging – you have a responsibility to put your concerns on the table.

In addition to applying the tips provided for managing conflict with co-workers, consider these additional steps if you need to manage conflict with an authority figure.

## Tips

**Make sure you are doing everything right** before taking steps to address the situation. Make an honest analysis of your work. Are you meeting stated expectations and doing everything you can to support your team or co-workers?

**Ask for a meeting** with your boss at a time when he or she may be able to give you his/her full attention. Politely describe what you have experienced and how it affects your performance. Being open about the situation generally helps to bring it to resolution.

**Offer a solution** and propose changes that could make working conditions better. Good managers are grateful for constructive, useful feedback. If changes are agreed to, make it a point to follow up at a later date.

**If you feel you are being unduly criticized, discuss the problems you are encountering professionally**, while maintaining your composure and calmness. Consider asking for a third party to be present to ensure the meeting is conducted appropriately and with civility.

**Find someone with the capacity and willingness to act as your mentor.** It can be helpful to have someone who understands the situation provide insight and guidance.

**Don't go above your immediate supervisor** unless it is a last resort. If nothing changes after speaking with your boss, take your concerns to higher management or Human Resources.

**At the end of the day, do your best to leave work at work.** By keeping your professional life separate from your personal life you can keep stress more manageable. If you don't see any change over a reasonable amount of time, consider your alternatives so that you can move past the problems you are currently encountering.

We want your questions, comments, and suggestions.

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