

# TIPS FOR HANDLING DIFFICULT PEOPLE

People are not their behaviour. If we react to another person's behaviour we are reacting to only a small part of the whole person, and we may not get positive outcomes. Behaviour is 'overt' and visible to us and in some ways all we have to go on, but it is produced by invisible covert 'drivers'. If we can understand these drivers we are better able to react professionally to whatever behaviour we are faced with and in some cases change the behaviour. We can try to get closer to 'drivers' by asking questions. Asking questions, using good questioning and listening technique can help. Asking "What is important to you about this..." will take us closer to core values and provide a deeper understanding of what is required here to get to a positive conclusion. There are different types of questions and skilled questioning gives us a real advantage, since the right combination of questions will get to the heart of an issue. Remember that delving too deeply with probing questions risks breaching rapport, whilst asking lots of open questions could result in information overload, and therefore not produce the specific insights we seek.

## 1. Notice Your Own Reactions.

- Who is in control here, them or you?
- Do you fight right back, give in or assert yourself?
- Can you empathise with why they may be feeling this way?

We have a choice to make. Stand back and think about the preferred outcome. If we focus on our choice of destination we may get there, rather than being purely reactive. Focus on the end. This focus helps us to stay on track when people are angry or aggressive. It takes some of the sting out of the negative energy because we have a focus.

## 2. Be Assertive.

Assertiveness is about relationship balance. If we have sufficient self-worth we will speak up, or make a stand whilst respecting the views or needs of others. Assertiveness is about wanting both parties to 'win', finding a fair compromise at times. Say how you feel, simply, calmly whilst still respecting the views of others. Sometimes we need to repeat ourselves calmly and in the same tone of voice several times until we are heard. It is ok to say 'no', change our mind or to take time to think things. Our mental mindset is visible and almost tangible to others so we should try to remain in win/win. Aggressive people will say their piece without respecting the views of others, their objective is often to win at all costs and often no one actually wins. Passive people often lack the confidence to take a stand and allow the other person to win, but assertive people say their piece whilst respecting the views of others and aim for a win all round.

## 3. Communicate.

Active listening skills are important for good communication and clarity. If our body language is saying something quite different, people will notice. Brains will focus on working out the incongruence, not what we are saying!

## 4. Acknowledge Truth & Logic.

"Yes, I can see how you might feel that." "Yes, I'm sure we could do things differently." These statements acknowledge the feelings of others, or the possibility of truth. Try not to apologise for saying 'no'. Sometimes 'no' is important to wellbeing, credibility and long-term relationships with customers. Better to be honest and say 'no' when it is clearly your only option, than draw things out because you were afraid to say it at the appropriate time. *"A "NO" uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a "YES" merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble."* **Mahatma Gandhi**

## 5. The Positives of Conflict.

Remember that sometimes conflict can be a chance to look at something differently, through someone else's eyes. If we accept it is unlikely that we will always agree with everyone else then we can accept that conflict is inevitable. If we can hold onto the mindset that says 'perhaps this person can teach me something' it may help us to remain calm and open. We can look for any possible truth or logic in what has been said. If necessary, we can give ourselves time to think things over before making any decisions. We need to try to be fair and objective. This is acting from the 'higher self', the cognitive, thinking part of the brain rather than using only the core emotional banks because the other person's anger has sent us towards a 'fight or flight' reaction.