

Strategies for Working with Great People...

who happen to be being difficult right now...

Establish rapport. Work at connecting with them. Only after establishing some rapport will you be able to shift how the interaction with them goes. You can accomplish this by having conversations about things that interest and matter to them.

Take care of them. If you can shift your focus of concern from yourself to others, it will change how you come across. Put your attention on taking care of them.

Monitor your tone of voice. Your tone of voice sends people either a positive or a negative message about your opinion of them.

Listen. Give your full attention until they are finished. Listen to understand first. Let them know you heard what they were saying. Ask questions to clarify their meaning, intent, and criteria. Summarize what you have heard. Confirm that you have it right. When enough sincere questioning, listening, caring, and understanding are brought together, a difficult person becomes less difficult and more cooperative.

Give people the benefit of the doubt. Assume that they do want to contribute and have things work. There is a positive intention behind whatever they do. Since they may be unaware of this, ask yourself what positive purpose might be behind a person's communication or behavior and acknowledge it.

What's behind their behavior? What are they committed to? Whenever a discussion starts to degenerate into conflict, try to ascertain the reasons why people are for or against something. Then look for an idea or solution that satisfies their criteria.

Ask them to be specific. When people get upset or stop being responsible for having things work, they tend to

generalize and become more abstract. Listen for the main points. Acknowledge these and then ask them to tell you more about each main point, being as specific as they can about what happened. Shift the focus to solutions once they are past the upset.

Now or later? Do you handle this now, during the incident, or wait until later? Sometimes it is preferable to wait until the incident or behavior is over. At other times, intervening when it is happening is best.

Set up your conversation. Let people know your intent when speaking to them. What is your purpose in saying what you are about to say? What result are you really aiming for? Let them know that. Doing this first lets people know where you are coming from and prevents many misunderstandings.

Be direct. Tactfully interrupt and ask for what you want. Give them the bottom line in what you want.

Be willing to say what is so for you. When something doesn't work for you, tell the truth about how it is for you and be prepared to listen.

"Thank you. I appreciate being told." When receiving criticism, just thank them. No defense, no explanation, no justification. A simple "thanks" is all it takes and it's over. Simply hear them out and thank them for communicating.

Draw the line. If they are unwilling to move forward, let them know it is unacceptable and move on.

Create an image of how you want to respond. I use the image of a martial arts wizard leaning out of the way of bullets from the movie, *Remo Williams*. It simply reminds me to not take any attack personally.