

PRINT MATTERS

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Dealing with difficult people

We all know them — the difficult people. The ones who challenge us to the core.

Unfortunately, we can't ship them all off to their own island, so we must learn how to deal with them. Fortunately, it's possible, but it may require a level of soul searching that you have not yet attempted. So at the risk of sounding like Oprah (not that there's anything wrong with that), here are our top 15 ideas for handling challenging people.

1. Accept reality.

Difficult people are not likely to change; they behave that way for a reason. They may have had challenges in their lives that negatively affect their ability to interact with others. As hard as it may be, try to show empathy and compassion and see them as human beings just like you. They are doing the best they can with what life has given them.

2. Don't take it personally.

Their issues are their issues and have nothing to do with you. If you take it personally, your emotions will come into play, which will increase the likelihood of conflict.

3. Listen.

It sounds simplistic, but it really is an effective tool. Sometimes people are difficult because they don't feel heard or understood. Merely listening to them is a great way to acknowledge their viewpoint and gain an understanding of what they want, and from there progress can begin.

4. Be very clear.

If you let your intentions be known, and give them the reasons and background behind your thought process, they will be better able to empathize with you and therefore more likely to cooperate.

5. Prepare.

Think about how the conversation will go and what feelings will arise for you, and then you will be better equipped to deal with the emotions when they surface.

6. Be positive.

If you are thinking about how you can create a good outcome, it puts your brain into a very creative and positive mode.

7. Breathe.

Deep breaths are scientifically proven to have a calming effect. It's a great method to deploy before, during and after your troubling interaction.

8. Show respect.

Hiding your true feelings is not always easy, especially if this person has repeatedly caused problems for you. However, you will have much better results with a congenial tone.

9. Stick to the facts.

Literally approach it like a science experiment — separate facts from assumptions and negative emotions. This will keep the conversation on more of an even keel.

“The likelihood of conflict decreases in proportion to the rapport you have in place.”

10. Connect on a personal level.

This one may make you laugh, and if going to lunch with this person is out of the question, that is fine. But at the very least have some interactions that are on a personal level. This could be as simple as asking questions about his or her family or hobbies. The likelihood of conflict decreases in proportion to the rapport you have in place.

11. View it as a learning experience.

You may chuckle at this one too, but life really does hand us lemons for a reason.

12. Seek advice.

Sometimes talking about an impossible situation aloud will yield answers you wouldn't find otherwise. Plus, the third party isn't emotionally involved and therefore may see a solution that wouldn't occur to you in your state of angst.

13. Let it go.

If you focus on how crazy the person is, that gives him power over you. Try not to let the situation haunt your thoughts.

14. De-stress.

Take the dog for a walk. Do yoga. Meditate. Watch your favorite TV show. Anything to just loosen up a bit and take the focus off the stressful situation.

15. Congratulate yourself.

It's time for chocolate, a glass of wine, or heck even an ice cream sundae! You have certainly earned it, and treating yourself for a job well done in a difficult situation is always a good idea.

So yes. There are people who were put on this earth to challenge us. But if we take the right approach, we can add some much-needed sanity to what is too often a toxic situation.

Editor's note: We would like to give credit to the following sources we used in our research: businessinsider.com, chopra.com, entrepreneur.com, forbes.com, psychologytoday.com, and scienceofpeople.com.



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Publisher's Corner

3,000 words a day?!?



Last November, I heeded the siren call from my local library to sign up for Nanowrimo — national novel writing month. While my novel remains unfinished, I learned several useful lessons during the process. In case you've ever felt the urge to write a book, here are five tips based on my recent experience.

1. The basics: Nanowrimo is a non-profit organization (nanowrimo.org). You sign up on its website and it helps keep you disciplined with your writing. You log how many words you've written, you track milestones, you connect with a community of writers, and you receive support and inspiration from published writers every week.
2. Local "write-ins" really work. You can find a local write-in by zip code on the nano website, and I heartily recommend them. You show up for a few hours of uninterrupted writing time in the company of other local writers. It forces you to make that time, it's fun, and you will get writing done!

3. Making the time to write is the hardest part. There's always something more pressing to do than sit down and write. Paying bills. Making dinner. Cleaning the house. Catching up on your emails. But you have to force yourself to put away everything that is "urgent" and just devote the time to the writing.

4. Realizing that it is all about making the time is the best part. The ideas, the plot, the characters...they'll all come. Don't stress about the content. You only have to organize your life to make the time to show up every day to write it.

5. Plan ahead. To "win" nanowrimo, you write 1,667 – 3,000 words every day in November so that at the end of the month you have 50,000 – 90,000 words and the first rough draft of your novel. It's a good idea to sign up on the website in October so that you can hit the ground running come November 1.

Most of the writers in my group, including me, didn't "win." But all of us made progress, and that's how books get written. One clawed-out hour at a time.

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