

Overcoming Coworker Conflict

Conflict is a part of relationships. Knowing what might be at the heart of the conflict can help you resolve the issues. Below are some common types of difficult coworkers, the potential reasoning behind their behavior, and possible strategies to explore the conflict. There are no quick fixes when it comes to conflicts with coworkers. Use dialogue to uncover common ground and agreements to move forward professionally.

Difficult Co-worker types	The Real Issue	Strategies
<p>Know it all</p> <p>"I have done and seen it all. Don't bother coming up with anything new, because I already did it. Trust me; even if you don't ask for my opinion, I'll give it to you anyway."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Might feel intimidated or threatened by your new ideas. ▶ Might be afraid of change. ▶ Might be fearful of losing influence and status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Thank them for their contributions. ▶ Connect their previous experiences with the new ideas or concepts. ▶ Attempt to understand their perspective by asking questions.
<p>Frenemy</p> <p>"Of course we're friends...just don't make me look bad to the boss. Because if you do I, will throw you under the bus. I may be nice to your face, but I really am out to sabotage your career."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Might feel intimidated or threatened by you or your success. ▶ Might be jealous of you. ▶ Might have trust issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Politely call the out the behavior. Do not ignore it. ▶ Let them know your intention (you will not harm them or their reputation) ▶ Attempt to understand their perspective by asking questions
<p>Self-proclaimed Leader</p> <p>"I should be in charge of this company. Until then, I will be in charge of you. I will always set myself up as the formal or informal leader because no one could ever do a better job than me."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Might be an overachiever. ▶ Might have control issues. ▶ Might feel intimidated or threatened by you or your potential. ▶ May lack self-awareness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Let them know that while you appreciate their leadership, perhaps this time another may be better qualified. ▶ Actively seek their opinion. ▶ Attempt to understand their perspective by asking questions
<p>Tattletale</p> <p>"Every time you break a rule, disagree with management, or leave early, I run and tell on you. I act like you can trust me but that's so I can find out all your secrets and blab then to the boss."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May seek acceptance and approval from leadership. ▶ May feel inadequate in the current situation. ▶ May be seeking attention from others. ▶ May feel it is their responsibility to hold others accountable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Let them know that this behavior is eroding your trust in them. ▶ Encourage them to talk to you before the go to the boss. ▶ Attempt to understand their perspective by asking questions.

<p>Boss's Favorite</p> <p>"The boss likes me more than you. We go to lunch, we hang out after work and I get all the great assignments. It really is all about who you know."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May seek acceptance and approval from leadership. ▶ May feel inadequate in the current situation. ▶ May truly believe that personal relationships mean more than performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Let them know that this behavior is eroding your trust in them. ▶ Encourage them to create a personal brand of their own, instead of an over reliance on the supervisor. ▶ Attempt to understand their perspective by asking questions.
<p>Gossip</p> <p>"I know all the dirt on everyone in the office and I have a snide comment about all of you. Be careful what you tell me because I will probably tell the entire office. I am too busy spreading rumors and half-truths to do any real work."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May like the attention received from having information. ▶ May feel insecure so they attack others before they are attacked. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Politely call the out the behavior. Do not ignore it. ▶ Let them know that it is not necessary or productive to gossip about others. ▶ Let them know you are not interested hearing the gossip. ▶ Attempt to understand their perspective by asking questions.
<p>Skater</p> <p>"Sure I only do about ¼ of the work you all do, but hey, you will cover for me, right? I just laugh to myself watching you idiots do all the work. Why work hard...someone else will eventually do it."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May lack drive and ambition. ▶ May feel inadequate in the current situation. ▶ May be a disengaged employee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Let them know the perception they are creating is damaging to their personal brand. ▶ Reinforce with them that everyone is responsible for the success of the team. ▶ Attempt to understand their perspective by asking questions.
<p>Downer</p> <p>"I hate my life...I hate my job...I hate everything. Nothing works out for me. You'll see...you'll end up just like me. This place sucks and all I want to do is complain about it."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May feel hopeless and stressed. ▶ May be seeking attention from others. ▶ May like the shared connection with others (although it is a connection based on negativity). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Let them know that while you can acknowledge their situation, you do not agree with their negativity. ▶ Do not encourage the negativity.

Insights

How you respond to coworker conflict says more about you and less about the other person in the conflict. You can demonstrate restraint, compassion and understanding while holding people accountable for their behavior. The key is to start with positive intent; the belief that most people are decent human beings and just need to be understood.