



Make Difficult People Disappear

How to Deal with Stressful Behavior and Eliminate Conflict

by Monica Wofford
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Take-Aways

- Most folks have felt annoyed by “difficult people.”
- Difficult people just do things their own way – and not in the same way as those who deem them difficult.
- If you change negative thinking about their behavior, they will seem more likable.
- Follow the “Platinum Rule”: “Do unto others as they would want to be done unto.”
- Develop self-awareness about your behavior – especially actions that people might perceive negatively – and you will be less inclined to judge others.
- Use the “CORE Multidimensional Awareness Profile” (“CORE MAP”) to understand the tendencies of other people and of yourself.
- The CORE MAP develops self-awareness by working with four behavioral types: “Commander, Organizer, Relater and Entertainer.”
- Acting in ways contrary to your behavioral type generates stress and discomfort.
- Carefully observe how your behavior changes under strain; you likely become difficult.
- Live and let live.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
5	6	5	6

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How to eliminate “difficult people” from your life by altering your own thinking and 2) What the “CORE Multidimensional Awareness Profile” is and how it can help.

Recommendation

Everyone knows someone difficult, but few people know how best to deal with irritating characters. Here’s some good news: When you change how you view annoying people, most of them will miraculously lose their effect – at least on you. According to workplace training consultant Monica Wofford, individuals who appear difficult simply don’t handle things the same way as the person judging them. Her advice is smart, insightful and easy to read. While she includes too much promotion of her consulting services and professional products, Wofford’s treatise offers a worthwhile approach to a tough topic. *getAbstract* recommends her engaging business fable to readers who need relief from difficult people.

Summary

Is Everyone Difficult?

“Difficult people” seem to be everywhere. They can be so hard to handle that you might be too irritated to consider how they got that way. You just wish they’d disappear.

They can, but not by magic. Difficult people vanish when you change your attitude toward them. Stop seeing them as irritating and, presto, they won’t be. Most seemingly difficult people are merely different. The way they think is not the way you think. How they handle things seems strange. You may mistakenly see these distinctive people as taxing, overly sensitive or even deliberately obstructive. The business fable that follows demonstrates how you can have more harmonious relationships with people you perceive as difficult if something changes – not in them, but in you.

Cybil: The Queen of Difficult

Cybil is a wife, a mother and an executive. She is an accomplished type *A* personality with terrific drive and focus. She is so task oriented and busy that she posts a reminder to sleep on her daily to-do list. Cybil believes that far too many of the people she deals with are difficult, including her husband, her son, her sister, her mother, her boss, many of the team members whom she supervises at work and most of the people she runs into during the day. Cybil’s mantra is, “I see difficult people.” She wonders if everyone tries to be annoying on purpose. Cybil is unaware of her interior processes and doesn’t understand why she perceives pretty much everyone in her life as difficult. She is so lacking in self-knowledge that she doesn’t even realize that she is unaware.

Cybil hired a trainer to conduct an all-day educational seminar for her employees. The topic: “How to Make Difficult People Disappear.” Cybil wanted to skip the session, but the trainer sought her participation to encourage her team members to take the activity seriously. Cybil acquiesced but planned to multitask on her BlackBerry during the session. She introduced the trainer, took her seat and whipped out her BlackBerry to get down to some real work.

“Trust that differences do not equal difficulties.”

“Most people aren’t difficult by nature. They’re different, and we make them difficult by expecting them to be just like us and then choosing to see them as difficult when they aren’t.”

“We click well with those who are similar or the same, but when most of us encounter people who are dramatically different, the tendency is to assume that they’re not just different, but wrong.”

“Organizers are needed on each and every team you lead because this [personality] is the only preference that will exert the time, effort, energy and patience to think through every single detail.”

“Entertainer preferences are the most enthusiastic, exuberant, charismatic, energetic and fun-loving folks on the planet.”

“We typically do what works well for us and...this is the behavior we often expect from others.”

Voices in Your Head

The trainer got everyone’s attention, especially Cybil’s, when she told the audience that leadership begins with the various voices that bang around in people’s heads. She explained that by controlling those voices – particularly those insisting that other people are difficult – you can see these supposedly aberrant people in a new light: They are not difficult, just different from you. Thus, the trainer explained, you can make difficult people disappear if you stop seeing them as difficult.

The trainer told the class that her goals for the seminar were to help everyone reach better self-understanding. She wanted all of the participants to acknowledge that sometimes other people consider them to be difficult. Through such self-awareness, she hoped they would come to comprehend that labeling other people as irritating is a mistake.

The Truth About So-Called Difficult People

The trainer explained that most folks are not deliberately or naturally irritating. Instead, she said, “They’re different, and we make them difficult by expecting them to be like us and then choosing to see them as difficult when they aren’t.” Once you label someone as difficult, the trainer said, you almost always think of that person in those terms and treat him or her accordingly.

The trainer told the class that when dealing with others, the Golden Rule – “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” – is not appropriate. It’s a mistake to communicate with others in the manner that you prefer, especially if you assume that they also prefer it.

“The Platinum Rule”

Rather than the Golden Rule, the trainer suggested applying the Platinum Rule: “Do unto others as they would want to be done unto.” This point resonated with Cybil, who began to understand that you should treat others according to what they need, not what you think they ought to have. And that means trying to figure out what someone, no matter how difficult, really needs.

Cybil could see how such enlightened treatment would immediately dispel many of the hard feelings that often mar relationships. She remembered that when she was a child, her mother and father had always made her feel bad about herself. They criticized her for her overly strong, aggressive personality. Cybil was always “too something” for her parents. They wanted “a nice, quiet, fluffy bunny,” not a pit bull. As a consequence, Cybil had tried all her life to be a softer and easier-going person than she really was – but it never worked. Cybil remained who she knew herself to be: a forceful and dominant woman.

As she considered her own personality, Cybil began to focus back on the classroom instruction. The trainer was discussing a personality tool that examines a person’s strengths and weaknesses by highlighting the behaviors people use when they feel stressed. “We’ll...identify, what, if anything, isn’t working for you,” said the trainer. “If you don’t like something, we’ll seek to modify that behavior.”

The “CORE MAP”

The trainer quickly got everyone’s attention by asking, “Have you come to the realization that in some cases you might be...part of the problem?” She explained that they could use a tool called the “CORE Multidimensional Awareness Profile” – or the CORE MAP – to

“If you are utterly convinced that someone is difficult, in most cases you are going to treat that person as if they are difficult – no matter what he or she does.”

“Home is not where you go when you’re tired of being nice to people.”

“The more we try to push difficult people out of our way...the more they push back.”

“Leadership and life do not go well when you carry them out on autopilot.”

increase their awareness of their own behavioral tendencies. This would help them better understand the negative voices inside their heads, as well as the behavior of other people.

The trainer explained that the acronym CORE derives from the system’s “descriptive preference labels”:

- **“Commander”** – This person is “assertive, decisive, extroverted” and “competitive”; under stress, Commanders can become “bossy, loud” and “aggressive.” The trainer described this personality type as “task-oriented, overachieving, highly productive” and “decisive.”
- **“Organizer”** – This thorough, dependable, “detailed” and “introverted” person becomes “narrow minded, withdrawn, passive aggressive” and “stubborn” under pressure. The trainer noted that Organizers tend to be detail oriented, logical, linear thinkers who always perceive the differences between right and wrong as crystal clear.
- **“Relater”** – Usually “friendly, cooperative, playful” and “patient,” this person is “sensitive, submissive” and “guilt laden” under strain. The trainer listed Relators as empathetic nurturers who can always find time to listen to their friends’ troubles.
- **“Entertainer”** – This “energetic,” spontaneous, “extroverted” person, when hassled, turns “pushy,” loud, “impatient” and “demanding.” Entertainers are energetic, enthusiastic and outgoing, with short attention spans. They are always ready to engage in conversations. In fact, said the trainer, an Entertainer would “converse with an inanimate object if one presented itself” to chat.

Some personality types naturally grate on others. For example, Organizers and Entertainers generally don’t get along; neither do Relaters and Commanders. A person from one group will likely regard a person from another group as difficult. Once people more comprehensively understand their own behavioral characteristics, as well as those of other people, they will be more inclined to view others as well-intentioned folks who are trying their best according to their own behavioral orientations. “It’s about behavior, not someone’s personhood,” the trainer said. The CORE categories do not define people. They point out what people will do, most notably when they are stressed.

Behavior “Trait Sets”

The trainer explained that the CORE MAP enables people to perceive their primary behavioral characteristics and to understand how stress affects their conduct. For example, Cybil saw herself in the description of the Commander type. The behavior that people often unknowingly exhibit teaches others how to treat them, sometimes with negative or unintended consequences. Most people are unaware of the signals they emit regarding how they prefer to be treated.

Audience members were intrigued with their CORE profiles. The trainer discussed the typical characteristics of each of the profile types and explained that because of how they were socialized growing up, many people exhibit behavioral characteristics that do not suit their personalities. For example, society often expects men to act like Commanders, even those who are much more comfortable being Relaters. The trainer explained that trying to carry out behaviors that are not natural to your personality results in tension, stress and depleted energy.

“We all hear conversations differently; we also see situations and people’s behavior differently.”

“Your polar opposites in the brain struggle the most with each other when one or both are under stress.”

“Two out of three people are walking around with a sense of low self-esteem.”

“Give yourself permission to be who you are.”

Next Steps

Cybil and the other members of the audience were pleased with what they had learned so far. The trainer told the audience members to use their CORE MAPS to outline ways to better understand their own psychological needs and behavioral characteristics, as well as the psychological needs of others and their behavioral styles. The CORE MAP raises self-awareness of what people do, when and why. It guides people to self-manage their behavior and to understand the behavior of others. Increased self-awareness should mean being less ready to certify someone else as difficult.

The trainer told Cybil to use the office’s CORE MAPS for coaching and to motivate and reward employees in ways that they will appreciate. She explained that the CORE MAPS can help improve interoffice communications, as well as communications with clients, customers and others outside the organization.

After the seminar, the trainer conducted an “assessment facilitation” with Cybil. The trainer shared a comprehensive report based on Cybil’s CORE profile, and they discussed the significance of her responses. The trainer explained that Cybil could use the CORE profile information to understand which behaviors work best for her at home and at work, and which stress-related behaviors she needed to limit.

Cybil and the other people at the seminar benefited from the CORE training and the awareness they developed of their own behavioral tendencies and of the behaviors of others that they previously would have considered difficult. After the training, Cybil found that she was less judgmental. The number of supposedly difficult people she encountered notably decreased. As a result, her life at home and work improved.

The other people at the training seminar also began to work more productively with each other as their relationships outside work improved. It is amazing what a little self-awareness and conscious behavioral control can achieve! Cybil and her boss were so pleased with the CORE training that they contracted with the trainer for future comprehensive CORE education and training that would benefit the entire organization and positively transform its corporate culture.

Live and Let Live

Stop judging. Stop viewing people with “difficult-colored glasses.” Just as you should be allowed to be yourself, let other people be themselves. Accept people for the fascinating beings they are. Learn to become fascinated with different behavior, not frustrated by it.

To tamp down the frustration that occurs when someone does something that you don’t like, immediately say the word “cancel” to yourself. The cancellation process shuts down the negative voices inside your head. You can control how you see the world and the people in it. Take charge of your own thinking. When you do, difficult people will vanish as if by magic.

About the Author

Monica Wofford, a certified CORE coach, is founder and CEO of Contagious Companies Inc., a training and consulting firm.