

## EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

# Tips for Handling Difficult People

### Aggressive/Domineering

- Wait for them to run out of steam. Try not to react in kind i.e. don't bite back.
- Don't argue with them or use confronting phrases such as "You're being ridiculous." Instead, use words like, "I'm interested in hearing what you think."
- Adopt a relaxed, positive, calm and firm tone. Do not match their voice quality. Watch your non-verbal behaviour to ensure that it matches self-confidence.
- Use the Aggressor's name at the beginning of the conversation. This will help to equalise the power.
- Do not laugh, be judgmental, or dismissive.
- Use reflective listening skills.
- Reframe what they say, making it more acceptable, focusing only on the rational component and repeating this back to the Aggressor. Always conclude your summary of their position by reasserting your position (broken record).
- If the Aggressor keeps on interrupting you, subtly let them know that you are aware they are doing this by not responding to what they added, but calmly say, "What I was about to say before was..."
- Don't take it personally. Overtly aggressive people are experienced at making the receiver feel that they are personally to blame for the situation.
- Continually try to calm yourself down and use rational self-talk.
- Only respond to the facts of the situation rather than to emotional argument.
- Do not block complaints. If the Aggressor still feels that they have a valid complaint, then you give them the details of someone they can take their complaint to, or refer them to your manager. Don't wear too much of the abuse before referring them on.
- If repeatedly threatened or you assess the first threat as more than "hot air", stay calm and terminate the discussion as quickly as possible, and report to the relevant authorities.
- With Aggressors it is important not to spend too much time pressing your view. Disengage as soon as you can by saying such closure statements as, "I understand you feel aggrieved or angry because of...", "As stated before... (your position on the issue)", "If you feel that your complaint is justified then you might like to take these issues to..."
- If Aggressors constantly use swear words or personal attacks ignore at first because it can be a tactic to get you to bite. Focus instead on using your communication ideals to identify what the issue and underlying needs are. If the personal barrage continues then stop and calmly but firmly tell the Aggressor that you really would like to progress the conversation to see if we can resolve this issue for them, but to do so you will need them to refrain from swearing and personal attacks.

### **"Over Sensitive"**

- Do not respond or overcompensate to signs of distress. Remain calm and steady.
- Do not be dismissive.
- Use reflective listening skills to demonstrate empathy but continually bring the person back to the facts and consequences.
- Encourage the person to focus on more positive aspects of the situation.

### **Manipulative/Deceptive**

Note: Many of the tips listed under "Aggressive" styles can be used with this character style. In addition:

- Stay calm and focused by using slow abdominal breathing and rational self-talk.
- If you have listened carefully to the reasons given by this person and you have decided to continue your course of action, then continually, in your responses, stick to the facts and therefore the necessary consequences (broken record).
- Complete your course of action and remove yourself as quickly and calmly as you can from the situation.
- Don't allow yourself to be sidetracked or persuaded by emotional argument.