

Dealing with Difficult People

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We all have people with whom we struggle with, problematic people who seem to drain us of our energies, rub us the wrong way, poke, provoke, frustrate or trigger us in unpleasant ways. Dealing with problematic friends, colleagues, and family members needn't be fraught and stressful. We can learn to deal with troublesome people by taking a deeper look at ourselves.

We are social animals. We are born into families and expand and grow in the world. We surround ourselves, for the most part, with people we enjoy and love, people who we have fun with, confide in, and rely on, and for whom we do the same.

Inevitably, we also encounter and become involved with people who are, to put it mildly, problematic. Some family members, friends, and colleagues can, at times, prove quite troublesome. They can upset, derail or challenge us, or bring conflict into even the most trivial exchange.

What is really happening

The dynamics between us and the problematic people in our lives often reflect back to us our own uncomfortable feelings of insecurity, incompetence, or inadequacy. The problematic people in our lives are simply mirroring back our own sensations, judgments, views, and experiences.

Showing us who we are

Every person we interact with holds up a mirror for us, and allows us to see certain aspects of ourselves. Each situation and every person we meet reflects certain traits or qualities about ourselves back to us. We know who we are as a son or daughter in front of our parents. We know who we are as a partner in front of our partner, a sibling in front of our brothers and sisters, a student in front of our teachers, a co-worker in front of our colleagues, and a friend among our friends. The world outside shows us who we are in various roles, events experiences, and situations.

We blame other people for the fact that we find them problematic, but it's not others who are getting us all worked up. Consciously or unconsciously, aspects of problematic people trigger our own insecurities. This sets off unpleasant emotions that challenge us when we are in their presence. As a result, we may judge these people negatively as difficult or problematic.

Look a little deeper

Take a closer, more compassionate look at someone with whom you struggle with. More than likely, this person is not *all* bad! What uncomfortable feeling of feelings do you associate with this person? What traits do you like or admire in this person? What traits do you have in common with them? What traits do you struggle with? Are there some troublesome traits that you have in common?

In our interactions with other people, even the most problematic person acts as a mirror. And every single person we encounter is teaching us something about ourselves and helping us grow by doing this.

A work-place example

Victoria, for, example, is a mid-career woman who has grown to dislike and mistrust a team member, Harold. Victoria wants to understand her issues with Harold, a team member and colleague. Over time, Victoria has felt undermined and disrespected by him. She makes note of Harold's qualities: those that frustrate her and cause her to mistrust him, those she shares, and those she admires.

They are both hard-working, reliable, and professional in the way they conduct themselves in the workplace. They are equally driven and ambitious. But where Victoria is careful to share credit with team members for their accomplishments, Harold often speaks of the team's ideas as if they are his own, and treats several team members as if they were his underlings rather than his peers. Also, while Victoria is quick to step in to help when a colleague is struggling with their workload, Harold is aloof and focuses only on his responsibilities.

On the other hand, Harold is very good at networking and making connections with people from various departments in the company... something she has never been good at. She admires his ability to prioritize his own workload and make connections with people that could lead to interesting career opportunities. Through reflecting on what she sees reflected back through Harold's 'mirror,' Victoria realizes that she could learn a thing or two about networking, focusing on her career goals and taking credit for her accomplishments. While Victoria admires Harold's social and networking abilities, she dislikes his tendency to take credit for other people's ideas. Victoria can say to herself: '*There are a lot of things about Harold that I admire. And there are some traits I wish I had. The ones I struggle with —I can't relate to them or do not know how to manage, react or deal with them.*'

Chances are

When you begin to examine what the problematic people in your life are mirroring back to you, chances are you will find that the traits you admire in others, are the traits you share, or traits that you would like to acquire.

The traits you struggle with are traits you mistrust or find undesirable or feel unable to manage well.

When someone mirrors back a trait with which you struggle or cannot relate, you need to reflect not only on why, but on how you could approach that trait with kindness, and compassion. Even with the most troublesome people in your life, compassion is the way forward.

Our higher, more authentic selves

We need to learn to see ourselves clearly in the equation of our lives, and to accept other people as they are. By seeing ourselves and others clearly, we can manage our expectations and conduct our interactions with greater awareness and compassion. Remember, the world outside of us — including even the most problematic people in it — show us aspects of ourselves. Through our interactions, we learn and grow, and become higher and more authentic versions of ourselves. This, after all, is why we're here.

Dealing with difficult people

Decide to approach the difficult people in your life in a healthier, compassionate way

Make note of troublesome traits of the problem people in your life

Acknowledge the common positive and negative traits you share, and traits they have that you admire

Accept people as they are, rather than trying to change them

Practice compassion in your dealings and interactions with others, especially those who challenge you

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About the author

Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker, columnist and advocate in the field of mental health and wellness.

*Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, will be available for pre-sales in November 2021, and her in-depth online self-help program, **A Deeper Wellness**, offers powerful mental health guidance, life skills, knowledge and healing, anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/> <https://www.drmonicavermani.com/>*

