

Top Ten Tips on Dealing with Difficult Issues

1- Be prepared

- 🧠 If you know, or can pre-empt, that there will be conflict or potential controversy, be ready with answers to the challenging questions and criticisms. Have a short 'inner dialogue' conversation to give yourself courage and embolden your approach.

2- Keep calm and objective

- 🧠 Respond, don't react. Stay focused and maintain a professional demeanour otherwise the focus will be on your behaviour, rather than what you say. It is often useful to refer to taking an objective perspective, as it excuses you from feeling that you have to join in with the emotional behaviour.

3- Ask open questions before you reveal your perspective

- 🧠 Open questions such as 'What is the key issue that is causing the difficulty?' rather than 'What's the matter?' keeps the focus on the issue not the person.

4- If the other person is emotional or 'ranting' – let them

- 🧠 When most people are upset or angry, they need a release. They are often annoyed at themselves as much as other people, so they need a 'catharsis', an outlet to pour out the tension and frustration. Let them; it will be smoother and quicker than reacting to an unguarded vitriolic comment. When they take a few moments to reflect, they may apologise for their outburst; this is a sign of progress and is unlikely to happen if you interrupt.

5- Decide what progress you want to make

- 🧠 Don't try to win an argument or gain the upper hand in the debate, but rather prioritise on the outcome you want to achieve at the time. If you have a key point that you want to make, choose a more appropriate moment when more rational behaviour is in evidence. During a conflict moment, try to get the other person to consider that there are other options and to recognise that their behaviour may be blocking the way towards a solution/resolution.





6- Assert yourself

- 🗨️ Although the recommendation is to allow the other person to pour out their frustration, do not be passive (or aggressive – ever!); asserting is when you say that you understand their perspective, however you can see alternative options and behaviours.

7- Do not accept insulting or disrespectful personal remarks

- 🗨️ Should the other person deliberately insult you or swear at you in an aggressive manner, there is no scenario where that should be acceptable or tolerated. It is recommended that you calmly announce that you will not accept such inexcusable comments/behaviour and that you are terminating the discussion. This makes it completely clear to the offending person that they will not be able to resolve their issues with you when they are behaving in an unreasonable manner. There is a strong likelihood that they will feel remorseful about causing offence and, because you have retained a professional approach, they may well apologise, and productive discussions can continue.

8- Never make disrespectful or insulting personal remarks

- 🗨️ No matter what insulting comments or inappropriate behaviour are being directed towards you, never resort to lowering your own dignity and professional standing by reacting and making comments you may regret. Maintain a high ethical and moral position – you will gain more respect by demonstrating that you can rise above negative behaviour by refraining from trading insults. If you 'give as good as you get', then you will only increase the level of conflict, rather than deal with it.

9- Never say 'calm down'

- 🗨️ The vast majority of people become angrier and less calm when patronised by the instruction to 'Calm Down!' It is often meant – and almost always regarded – as demeaning, so it will rarely be successful in reducing conflict. One suggestion is to acknowledge (and possibly empathise) that they have an understandable reason to be unhappy/angry etc, but that you would find it easier to talk through the issues when there is less of an emotionally-charged atmosphere – and you suggest that it would be wise to resume the discussion later.



10- Invite them to consider the options or next steps

- 🌱 Once the catharsis of unproductive emotion has been released, give the other person space, and be patient before inviting them to start looking at the options or alternatives available. This may put a wider perspective on the situation and may even cause the other person to recognise that their emotional outburst or conflict orientation is misplaced and unproductive.

If you or your organisation would be interested in learning more about managing conflict & dealing with difficult issues, please call 01937 579649 or email

info@dicksontraining.com

