

# Beyond Civility: How to Really Get Along with Coworkers

BY SHARI PEACE

Studies show that tough relationships and disagreements deflate work morale faster than anything else.

It makes sense, then, that working to strengthen relationships can do wonders for your productivity: Fix the conflict, feel better, and get more done. The tougher the relationship, the bigger your payoff in working to make it better. It's probably safe to say that most people want to fix strained relationships and are even willing to invest the time and energy to do so. But here's the tricky part: You may be focusing on how you want the other person to change. If they do change, that's a great bonus. But because that may not happen, a smarter strategy is to select the best tools you can use to navigate through whatever obstacles appear in your path to constructive relationships.

Try these tips to make even the thorniest relationships easier to handle:

■ **Attack the problem, not the person.** Imagine that you aren't getting information you need from another department, and it's causing your work to suffer. You may presume the other department is lazy, or doesn't care, or is trying to sabotage your success. Instead of attacking the people involved, attack the problem. Suggest a meeting to determine what the problem is and why you aren't getting the information. The real problem may be short staffing or system problems—or they may not be getting the information

they need from someone else. You'll stay solution-oriented and engage others with your professionalism intact.

■ **Look for the good in the people who frustrate you the most.** It isn't necessary to like all your coworkers, but it is necessary to treat everyone with respect. The best way to respect someone is to discover their strengths, skills, or contributions; then, focus on those instead of what you *don't* like. The more you can recognize a person's good qualities, the easier it is to show the genuine respect.

■ **Don't let the "crabs" get you down.** A crab is the type of person for whom nothing is ever right, nothing is ever good enough, and there's not one single thing they can do to make it better (in their mind, at least). If you stay determined, you can keep a "crab" from pulling you down to their level. Use these 5 steps:

1. Try to understand why they're negative. They may be dealing with a serious life issue. Understanding may help you be more sympathetic and less frustrated.

2. Talk to them about it. Tell them you've noticed they have seemed a little down and offer to help. They may exercise their right not to divulge anything, but it may help just to know someone cares. It also can help them realize how they're coming across (they truly may not realize how much their negativity is affecting others).

3. Avoid them if the situation doesn't show signs of improvement.

4. Remove them from your environment (if possible and if truly necessary).

5. Have a "recovery plan." If steps 1-3 above haven't worked, and you can't remove them (which is often the case with a coworker), have a plan for how you'll replenish your good mood after you come into contact with them. A recovery plan will help make sure that even if you can't change the situation, you can at least make sure it won't destroy your mood and your productivity all day.

■ **Give one more compliment or piece of praise every day.** Studies show that the No. 1 motivator for most employees is feeling appreciated. While that recognition can and should come from managers, every employee can make it a priority to say "thanks" more often.

■ **Keep your attitude as positive as possible, whatever your circumstances.** It's easy to think your attitude is determined by other people and by uncontrollable events in your life. But if that's true, you've lost control over your own life. Be resolved to be as happy as possible, for just five minutes at a time. You'll feel better, you'll be easier to get along with.

Shari Peace is president of Peace Talks, a Dayton, Ohio-based professional speaking firm, and is the author of *Crank It Out! How to Get More Done—At Work & In Your Life*. Reach her at [peacetalks@msn.com](mailto:peacetalks@msn.com) or at 877/808-8520.