

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CO-WORKERS

This session provides an opportunity to brainstorm and problem-solve situations involving difficult co-workers.

CATEGORY

- Life Skills
- Communications
- Interpersonal Skills

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify strategies regarding how to interact with difficult co-workers.
- Formulate plans to handle difficult co-workers.

SUPPLIES

- **Handling a Difficult Situation** activity sheet—make a copy for each participant
- Pen or pencil for each participant

ADVISOR NOTE: Text in italics should be read aloud to participants. As you engage your post in activities each week, please include comments, discussions, and feedback to the group relating to **Character, Leadership, and Ethics**. These are important attributes that make a difference in the success of youth in the workplace and in life.

ACTIVITIES

Introduction

Ask Explorers the following questions:

- *Have you ever had to deal with a difficult person at school or on a project?*
- *What happens when someone is hard to work with?*
- *What should you do when someone is difficult to work with?*

After soliciting answers, share these guidelines for working with difficult people.

- Forgive the co-worker if he or she did something to hurt you.
- Decide if it is really important for the co-worker to know you are right.
- Don't respond if someone says something negative.
- Don't talk with a co-worker about your negative feelings for another co-worker.
- Don't react negatively or with anger in the heat of the moment.
- Try to understand how your co-worker feels.
- Try to understand how other people see your actions.
- Look for lessons to be learned through the conflict.
- Ask yourself what the worst-case scenario is if you do or do not respond.
- Avoid heated discussions or raising your voice.
- Step outside or close your office door for a few minutes to calm down.
- Be nice to someone, even if he or she isn't nice to you.

Activity 1

Handling a Difficult Situation

Distribute the **Handling a Difficult Situation** activity sheet. Ask the Explorers to work with a partner and come up with a constructive solution to each of the scenarios presented on the activity sheet.

When Explorers are finished, gather together the larger group and discuss the questions below.

ADVISOR NOTE

Some sample questions are below. They are designed to help the participants apply what they have learned to their own interests. You are welcome to use these questions or develop your own questions that relate to your post or specific focus area.

REFLECTION

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| Focusing Questions | ▪ <i>What is the most important point in the guidelines in your opinion?</i> |
| Analysis Questions | ▪ <i>What is the value in brainstorming solutions to the difficult situations described on the activity sheet?</i>
▪ <i>How might you use this in your potential career?</i> |
| Generalization Questions | ▪ <i>How are the decisions you make in these situations evidence of your character?</i>
▪ <i>How does solving a problem like those described today provide an opportunity to demonstrate leadership?</i>
▪ <i>How might you use this in life or in college?</i>
▪ <i>Why is this important?</i> |

RESOURCES

HANDLING A DIFFICULT SITUATION

Guidelines for working with others:

- Forgive the co-worker if he or she did something to hurt you.
- Decide if it is really important for the co-worker to know you are right.
- Don't respond if someone says something negative.
- Don't talk with a co-worker about your negative feelings for another co-worker.
- Don't react negatively or with anger in the heat of the moment.
- Try to understand how your co-worker feels.
- Try to understand how other people see your actions.
- Look for lessons to be learned through the conflict.
- Ask yourself what the worst-case scenario is if you do or do not respond.
- Avoid heated discussions or raising your voice.
- Step outside or close your office door for a few minutes to calm down.
- Be nice to someone, even if he or she isn't nice to you.

Part 1. Handling a Difficult Situation

Read the following scenarios and discuss with your partner what the individual should have done differently.

John works in a cubicle between Claire and Kate, who are best friends. Whenever Claire or Kate wants to say something to the other, instead of getting up and going to the other person's cubicle, they raise their voice and talk back and forth from their own cubicles. One day while they were talking back and forth, John became frustrated because he couldn't concentrate on his work. He stood up and said, "You two need to shut up because some people are trying to work."

What should John have done differently?

Richard leaves his cellphone on his desk during the day. He keeps the ring tone volume turned up all the way so he can hear it ring if he is away from his desk. One day he left it on his desk while he went to lunch. Jacob is in the cubicle next to Richard, and every few minutes while Richard was at lunch, his cellphone rang and Jacob had to listen to the ringtone play over and over because Richard wasn't there to answer it. Finally, Jacob had enough, and he walked over to Richard's desk and took the battery out of the cellphone.

What should Jacob have done differently?

Part 2. What Would You Do?

Read the following scenarios and discuss with your partner what you would do to resolve the conflict.

Every morning when you are beginning to work, your co-worker Juliet comes to sit in your cubicle with you. Even though you are trying to respond to emails and return phone messages, Juliet spends at least 30 minutes telling you about everything she did the night before. Lately, you have noticed your boss

watching the two of you every morning and you are afraid of getting in trouble for talking too much during work.

How would you use the strategies you learned today to resolve the situation?

Your cubicle is next to Miles. During the afternoon while you are trying to work, he listens to music through his computer speakers. At first you didn't mind because the music wasn't very loud. But lately he has been playing the music louder, and some of the music has offensive lyrics.

How would you use the strategies you learned today to resolve the situation?