Handling Difficult Situations and People

Doug Kalish, PhD

If you haven’t already done so and if you have a computer, go to www.dougsguides.com/conflict_style and fill out the Excel spreadsheet.
Acknowledgement

Some content based on materials developed by Drs Carl and Suzanne Cohen, Science Management Associates. Used with their permission.
Common Workplace Conflicts

• Disagreeing in meetings
• Dealing with pushy, obnoxious, competitive colleagues who defocus you from the task
• Arguments over space, equipment, noise, cleanliness
• Mediating disputes between others
• Colleagues taking credit for work they didn’t do
• Cultural conflicts
Why do I have to deal with other people?

Let's assume that you are the smartest person alive and that you can solve any problem faster than anyone else.

The problem is that there is only one of you, so your contribution is going to be limited to the number of hours you can stay awake.

If you can work with a team of people, you can do much bigger things and have a much bigger impact.
What can you do?

ADMIT:
• Good technical or creative skills aren’t enough
• Some conflict is inevitable – and healthy
• Emotional situations are a way of life and cannot be avoided

DO:
• Learn skills to help you cope with difficult situations
• Teach those skills to others
Making the Transition from College to the Real World

Workshops, eBooks, and links to help you survive and thrive in your first job.

Congratulations on leaving or getting ready to leave college, grad school, or your post-doc. You've learned a lot, had fun and made friends. Now you're looking for a job and the reality is sinking in... College hasn't fully prepared you for the Real World. Relax, and welcome to dougsguides: a set of eBooks, workshops, and links to help you find a great job with great companies.
Agenda

• Assessing personal styles of conflict resolution
• Handling difficult people
• Disagreeing without being disagreeable
• Fixing toxic meetings
Some conflict is inevitable and can be productive

- Project direction and scope
- Interpretation of data
- Strategic and tactical disagreements
- Making decisions in the absence of information
- Making decisions in the presence of information
Some conflict is toxic

• Political infighting
• Conflicts with other project members
• Unproductive, disinterested or incompetent co-workers
• Hostile work environments
• Stealing credit
• Suspect ethics
• Bad management
### Conflict Resolution Style Assessment Key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Style</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Competing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Collaborating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Accommodating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Competing style (A)

“It’s not enough that I win – you must lose.”

- Minimal cooperation
- Opposing views ignored
- Wins by argument, rank, or politics
- Scorched earth policy

Can be appropriate when goal is quick action, unpopular decisions or vital issues
Compromising style (B)

“You win some, you lose some.”

• Giving up something to get something
• Assertive and cooperative
• Equally powerful and cooperative parties
• Able to evaluate fairness

Be careful not to give up something you can’t live without.
Collaborating style (C)

“Let’s find the solution that works for both of us.”

• Satisfy both sides
• Highly assertive and cooperative: win/win
• Merging perspectives, gaining commitment
• Open discussion of issues (concerns), not just positions
Accommodating style (D)

“Whatever you decide is ok with me.”

- Foregoing my concerns to satisfy you
- Sacrifice, selfless, low assertiveness

Appropriate to create goodwill, or issues of low importance
Avoiding style (E)

“I’ll think about that tomorrow.”

• Conflict avoided
• Relationships maintained

OK with issues of low importance, when tensions are high, or other larger battles are looming.
Match the style to the context

• You can choose your style deliberately and strategically.
  – With your thesis advisor: Accommodating
  – With your friends: Collaborating
  – With the cable company: Competing

• Worthwhile to consider: What style is the other side using?
# My preferred styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Style (A-E)</th>
<th>Style Descriptor</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Collaborating</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Competing</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dealing with demanding people

• Fred: “I have an important meeting later today and I need the conference room that you are signed up for. OK?”
• Freida: “No, I’m pretty sure I need it.”
• Fred: “Do you or don’t you? Because I have to use it.”
• Freida: “I may need it depending how our client phone call goes.”
• Fred: “Look, I need a conference room and yours is the only one available.”
• Freida: [Competing, Compromising, Accommodating, Avoiding?]
How to deal with difficult people

1. **Find something to **AGREE** with**
   - Acknowledge there is an issue. It’s hard to argue with someone who is agreeing with you.

2. **EMPATHIZE with them**
   - What are they feeling? Acknowledge their emotion even if you disagree with their perception of the problem.

3. **INQUIRE to get more information**
   - Understand the issues. Move from confrontation to collaboration as quickly as possible.
Control your emotions

Do
- ignore insults
- be patient and non-defensive
- be considerate
- acknowledge screw-ups asap

Don’t
- be evasive
- point out their faults
- make excuses
Fred: “I have an important meeting later today and I need the conference room that you are signed up for. OK?”

Freida: “No, I’m pretty sure I need it.”

Fred: “Do you or don’t you? Because I have to use it.”

Freida: “I may need it depending how our client phone call goes.”

Fred: “Look, I need a conference room and yours is the only one available.”

Freida: “Better keep looking.”

Fred: ????
What could Fred say to defuse the situation?

Fred:

“(AGREE) I know that you have signed up for the room and you have a right to it.

(EMPATHIZE) I can see it’s upsetting to you that I’m asking you to reschedule.

(INQUIRE) Is there some way we might both be satisfied? When do you need it? Do you need it for the whole time? Can you postpone your meeting until later?”
Fred: “I need to use the conference room that you are signed up for. OK?”

Freida: “Fred, you have an important interview, right? I can see that you’re in a bind. I may need the room depending on our client call.” [AGREE, EMPATHIZE]

Fred: “Do you or don’t you? Because I have to use it.”

Freida: “Is there some way we might both be satisfied? When do you need it? For how long? If it turns out we need it, can we have the room back?” [INQUIRE]
Or Fred could do it right to begin with

• Fred: “Frieda, I forgot to sign up for a conference room this afternoon and now I’m in a bind. I know it’s a pain for you to deal with this. Do you need it for the whole time? Is there any way I can use it just before or after your time? Is there a possibility you can postpone your meeting until later?”
What would you do?

Your collaborator is pressuring you to complete a project in a week so she can move on to another more important project. You think it will take at least three weeks to do the research and write it up.

Her: “We need to finish this project by the end of the week.”

You: “Dream on. It’s too much work.” (wrong)
Dealing with critical and judgmental people

You’re on a project when one of the other team members comes to you and says:

“You really screwed up royally. We’re going to have to re-do everything you’ve done. You’re a parasite on this project.”

How do you respond?
What would you do?

After a meeting, a co-worker confronts you:
"You totally undermined me during that meeting. Every time I made a suggestion you shot it down! You made me feel like a total idiot and embarrassed me in front of our boss! I thought you were a friend, but I can see you are just out for yourself."
Disagreements

Published on June 14, 2011
### “I” vs “You” statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“You”</th>
<th>“I”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You never show up on time for meetings”</td>
<td>“I’m frustrated from having to wait for you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You don’t appreciate all the hard work and long hours I put in”</td>
<td>“I’m feeling unappreciated and taken advantage of”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Your work is garbage”</td>
<td>“I’m concerned that we won’t have a good result if the quality of your work doesn’t improve.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Your turn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“You”</th>
<th>“I”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You’re an idiot”</td>
<td>“I disagree”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You’re a bully and a loudmouth”</td>
<td>“I’m offended by what you said”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You never listen”</td>
<td>“I don’t feel heard”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Your work is sloppy and useless”</td>
<td>“I need higher quality work from you”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Disagreements

Fred: “Your estimate of how long this project will take is way too low. You forgot that we are depending on Fenster to do some of the work and everyone knows he is always late.”

Freida: “No, I already talked with Fenster and went over the schedule with him. I mentioned that last week. You never listen.”

Fred: “You’re a jerk if you believe anything he says.”

What could Fred have said initially?
“That may not be the stupidest thing I ever heard, but it’s definitely in the Top 10. Are you a complete idiot?”
For more practice...

Go to

http://www.dougsguides.com/people_quiz

for a self-assessment on how well you handle difficult people and situations.
Toxic meetings

Published on June 15, 2011
Meeting Attendee’s Bill of Rights

Every meeting should have:
• A defined start and stop time
• An agenda
• Handouts distributed before the meeting
• People with a reason to be there
• Someone in charge
• Balanced input from the attendees
• Summary and action items

For a frameable copy go to:
http://www.dougsguides.com/meetingetiquette
Handling toxic meetings

• Unproductive and boring
  – Define the purpose of the meeting

• Distractions: Laptops and cellphones
  – Bans and fines

• Showboating
  – “Can we set a limit on this interesting discussion to leave time for others?”

• Feeding Frenzy
  – “I think you’ve all made your point and it’s time to move on”
In the history of human relations…

…no problem has ever been solved by being ignored.

Don’t avoid problems or hope they will go away.
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