

Module #8

Working With Difficult People

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Working With Difficult People

Difficult people are the ones who:

- Make us lose our cool.
- Force us to do things we don't want to do.
- Prevent us from doing what we want or need to do.
- Use coercion or manipulation to get their way.
- Make us feel guilty if we don't "go along."
- Make us feel anxious, upset, frustrated, depressed, jealous, inferior or defeated.
- Make us do their share of the work..

As you read down that list, particular difficult faces may have come to mind, or memories of specific difficult events. In this module, you will gain tools for working with such people. We hope that these tools will help you take some of the power out of those faces, and those events will not be repeated!

First, we'll meet some of the classic types of difficult people you meet at work and in your personal life. Second, we'll discuss what makes a person a difficult person (they are not that different from the rest of us). Then we'll turn to some of the communication skills you can use in working with difficult people. Finally—and this is where the bulk of our time will be spent—we'll look at how to apply those skills with each of the difficult people types we have introduced.

Objectives

1. Identify behavior patterns associated with "types" of difficult people.
2. Describe a model for explaining human behavior in terms of meeting basic intents.
3. Explain the behavior of difficult people using the model of meeting basic intents.
4. Give examples of several communication skills useful in working with difficult people and others.
5. Describe strategies for working with difficult people.

1. Introducing the Difficult People

Focus Question:

What are the types of habitually difficult people I may meet at work or elsewhere?

“Introduce me to difficult people?” you may be thinking. “I already know plenty of them!” That may well be the case. Sometimes they seem to be all around us; sometimes they may be closer than we dare to admit. But it only takes one or two truly difficult people to make your life more difficult.

People are individuals, and each one is unique—including the difficult ones. Bear with me, then, while I present these “types” of people. In discussing types of people throughout this module I do not intend to reduce any person from full color, three-dimensional reality. In discussing types of people we are really discussing sets of behavioral patterns. Recognizing the patterns of behavior can help us understand our co-workers and learn to work more effectively with them. That is our goal in describing types of people.

Notice, too, that I use the masculine pronouns (he, him) and names almost always in describing and illustrating the difficult people. Men, please take no offense at my taking this path. I certainly don’t mean to imply that only men are difficult people, or that women are better at dealing with difficult people, or any other gender-related slant. My choice to use “he” was simply a matter of convenience.

Apologies made, let’s move forward. The following summary of difficult people types, and much of the content of this module, is adapted from two books, *Coping with Difficult People* by Robert M. Bramson and *Dealing with People You Can’t Stand* by Rick Brinkman & Rick Kirschmer.

Tank

The Tank is confrontational, pointed and angry, the ultimate in pushy and aggressive behavior. The Tank has learned that people will submit when intimidated. He intimidates.

Sniper

Whether through rude comments, biting sarcasm or a well-timed roll of the eyes, making you look foolish is the Sniper’s specialty. In a meeting the Sniper says, “Who could have come up with such a stupid idea?” and then grins broadly as if it were a joke. He is taking a pot-shot at the person who proposed the idea.

Know-It-All

Seldom in doubt, the Know-It-All has low tolerance for correction and contradiction. The Know-It-All controls by asserting, even flaunting, his expertise. His expertise is genuine, but the tragic flaw of the Know-It-All is that he believes no one else has anything to contribute to his ideas. If something goes wrong, however, the Know-It-All will speak with the same authority about who’s to blame – you!

Think-They-Know-It-All

The Think-They-Know-It-All appears to be an admirable expert on whatever subject comes up. They can’t fool all of the people all of the time, but they can fool some of the people some of the time, and enough of the people all of the time. How annoying!

Grenade

To get attention, the Grenade uses a strategy learned at age two—throwing a tantrum. After a brief period of calm, the Grenade explodes into unfocused ranting and raving about things that have nothing to do with the present circumstances.

Yes Person

In an effort to please people and avoid confrontation, Yes People say yes without thinking things through. They react to the latest demands on their time by forgetting prior commitments, and they over-commit until they have no time for themselves. Then they become resentful.

Maybe Person

In a moment of decision, a Maybe Person procrastinates in the hope that a better choice will present itself. Sadly, with most decisions, there comes a point when it is too little, too late, and the decision makes itself.

Nothing Person

No verbal feedback. No nonverbal feedback. Nothing.

No Person

More deadly to morale than a speeding bullet, more powerful than hope, able to defeat big ideas with a single syllable. Disguised as a mild mannered normal person, the No Person fights a never-ending battle for futility, hopelessness and despair. “We tried it before and it didn’t work.”

Complainer

Complainers feel helpless and overwhelmed by an unfair world. Their standard is perfection, and no one and nothing measures up to it. But misery loves company, so they bring their problems to you. Offering solutions makes you bad company, so the whining escalates.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What type of difficult person is likely to say “Sure, I can do that for you. Whatever needs to be done...!” but then he rarely follows through.
A. Complainer
B. Sniper
C. Nothing Person
D. Yes Person

2. What type of difficult person is likely to say, "We could never make it work. I've been doing this a long time, and I can tell you, what you suggest is impossible."
- Nothing Person
 - Sniper
 - No Person
 - Grenade
3. What type of difficult person is likely to tell his baseball team captain "Great job" when he strikes out with bases loaded and the game is now lost.
- Sniper
 - Tank
 - Maybe Person
 - Know-It-All
4. "Obviously you haven't learned the intricacies of the operating system. To anyone who has, it is clear that what I'm proposing is the best solution." What difficult person is likely to say this?
- Yes Person
 - Tank
 - Complainer
 - Know-It-All
5. You ask him a question. You wait a long time. He shrugs. Which difficult person might you be talking to?
- Nothing Person
 - Grenade
 - Think-They-Know-It-All
 - Maybe Person
6. "Jones, I've had it up to here with your incompetence! Your reports are not just crap, they are late crap! Get to work! Use some of that brainpower people say you have! And get it in on time for a change. I don't care if you have to skip your *vegan* lunches and stay overnight eight days a week! Get it done! No excuses!" Which difficult person might say this?
- Tank
 - Grenade
 - Complainer
 - Think-They-Know-It-All
7. "Do it over? You want me to do it over? You don't get it, how hard I've worked on that. But then no one gets it! You don't! The big boss doesn't! My wife doesn't! The kids don't! All they care about is getting to their soccer games! Their coaches don't care! And it's getting dark so early now....!" Which difficult person might behave this way?
- Tank
 - Know-It-All
 - No Person
 - Grenade

Continued next page.

8. Which difficult person might say this: "Julie has been out so much lately, and I've had to pick up her work. So if I'm behind it's because of that. And the work has become more complicated with the changes we've made lately. I should tell you too that my mom has been kind of sick lately, and that's stressing me out. My computer has been acting buggy lately too."
- No Person
 - Complainer
 - Think-They-Know-It-All
 - Sniper
9. "I'm not sure which one might be the best. Why don't you choose?" Which difficult person is likely to say this?
- Think-They-Know-It-All
 - Nothing Person
 - Yes Person
 - Maybe Person
10. In this conversation, what kind of difficult person might Ted be?
- TED: Keeping a balance between the gauss and the hyzer is really important.
- KIM: How is it important?
- TED: Oh, you know. It makes a big difference.
- Think-They-Know-It-All
 - Know-It-All
 - Tank
 - Maybe Person

Answers:

1-D; 2-C; 3-A; 4-D; 5-A; 6-A; 7-D; 8-B; 9-D; 10-A See Discussion of Quiz on p. 50-57.

2. Why People Are Difficult

Focus Questions:

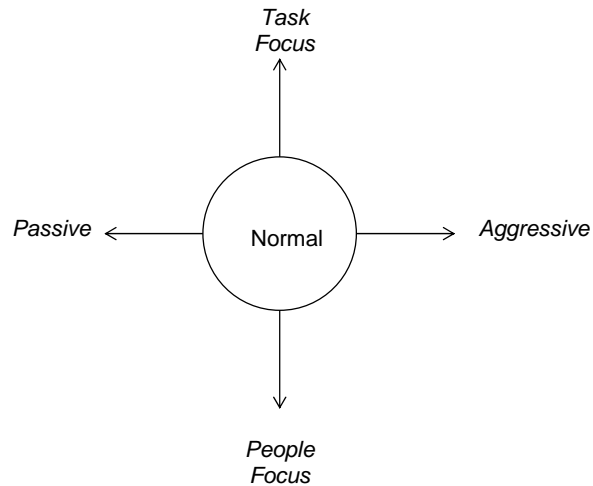
Why are some people difficult?

What are the four "intents" or goals people are trying to satisfy in whatever they do? In what ways are difficult people simply exaggerations of "normal" people?

Why have some people become so difficult? Have they come from another planet and invaded ours just to make our lives miserable? Or do we have more in common with them than it might first seem? Let's take a look at a model for explaining human behavior. This will help us understand "non-difficult people." And then we'll see the twist that helps create the behavior of difficult people.

Basic Intent

Brinkman & Kirschner hold that two sets of drives or tendencies shape our decisions and actions as people. 1) a focus on tasks or on people, and 2) a tendency to be aggressive or passive. These can be diagrammed like this:



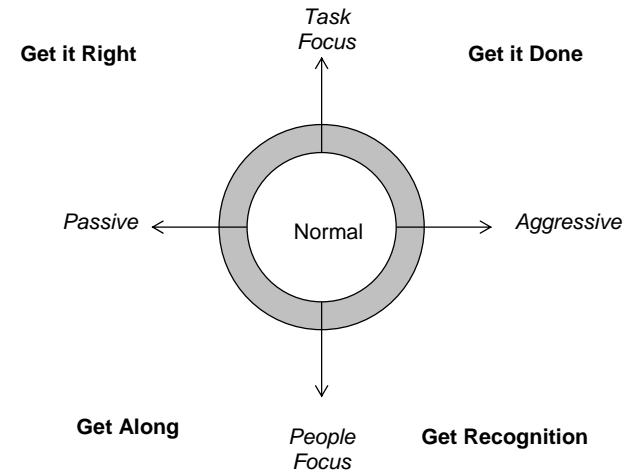
The Focus axis and the Passive-Aggressive axis are both drawn with arrows. This is to suggest a continuum, a sliding scale, rather than an either/or. No one, for example, is absolutely Passive all the time. And at different times each of us moves on these scales depending on circumstance. The circle in the middle represents the range of behavior that is considered normal.

Here's an example of movement on these scales. Some years ago I came to be responsible for the budget of a state-funded grant at our school. In a meeting with the state compliance monitor, my supervisor Ed and I discovered that our spending and our budget did not match up very well. We weren't overspending, but we could spend more if we adjusted our budgets for the previous three years. Ed asked me to do the research necessary and adjust the budgets. I hadn't done such work before, but I would try it since Ed asked me to. In agreeing to the project I was working in a passive orientation focused on people ("because Ed asked me"). My basic intent at this point was to **Get Along**.

This budget task was a big extra beyond my normal responsibilities. I stayed late in the evening a number of times over the next several weeks to get accurate numbers for the budgets. I suppose I could have done the work faster if I'd had some coaching, but I didn't want to bother anyone else at work. In doing so I had shifted to a task-oriented focus, but still passive in my relationships with people. My basic intent was to **Get It Right**.

As the date approached for the next visit from the state monitor approached, I was anxious to be finished. I remember that evening just a couple days before my project due date when my wife called me at work at 7 PM. "I know we haven't had dinner together even once this week. But I've got to finish this project," I told her, and abruptly hung up the phone. At this point I was aggressively task focused. My basic intent was to **Get It Done**.

The day came when Ed and I met with monitor. The monitor looked over my work, ran a few adding machine tapes, and approved it. My work was approved, with the result that our organization had an additional \$58,000 to spend in the state contract that year. Leaving the meeting, Ed said he was going to go tell his boss the good news. "I'll go with you," I told Ed. In going with Ed to tell his boss the outcome of my work, my basic intent was to **Get Appreciated** or recognized.



These four basic intentions—

- Get it Done
- Get it Right

- Get Along
- Get Appreciated

—can be placed on the diagram as shown:

- When I am aggressively task-focused, I am functioning in a **Get It Done** mode.
- When I am aggressively people-focused, I am functioning in a **Get Recognition** mode.
- When I am passively people-focused, I am functioning in a **Get Along** mode.
- When I am passively task-focused, I am functioning in a **Get It Right** mode.

We slide among these four “intents,” and most of the time we all remain in the range of what is considered “normal” behavior.

Reflection Question:

In which of these four modes do you tend to operate most of the time?

Comprehension Questions

11. T F When I agree to do something because I value my relationship with the person who asked me, I am operating in a Get Along mode.
12. T F Accountants, pharmacists and engineers will be more successful if they are comfortable working in the Get It Right mode.
13. T F If completing a project is the most important thing to me, I am working in a Get It Done mode.
14. T F My wife had to work on Saturday, and when she got home showed her all the household chores I had accomplished. I was in a Get Recognized mode.

Answers:
11-T; 12-T; 13-T; 14-T. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

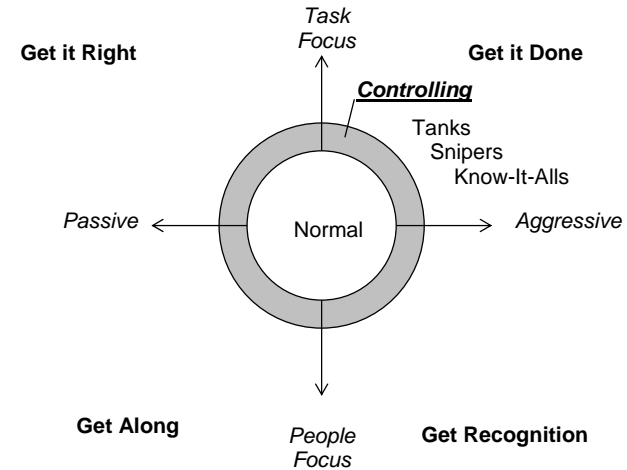
“Gray Zone” Behavior and Beyond

Focus Question:

What happens when one of the modes or intents is pushed out of proportion in an individual?

Most of the time we remain in the range of what is considered “normal” behavior. This normal range is represented by the white circle in center of the diagram. Outside the range of normal behavior is the gray zone between normal, acceptable, appropriate behavior and the zone of abnormal, unacceptable, inappropriate behavior.

Having too much stress in my life or in a situation can push me into this gray zone of questionable acceptability. If my drive to Get It Done becomes exaggerated in a circumstance, then I might begin to demonstrate some **Controlling** behaviors that push the limits of the normal. When the situation changes, when the stress is reduced, I will probably adjust my behavior back from the gray area into the central, normal range.



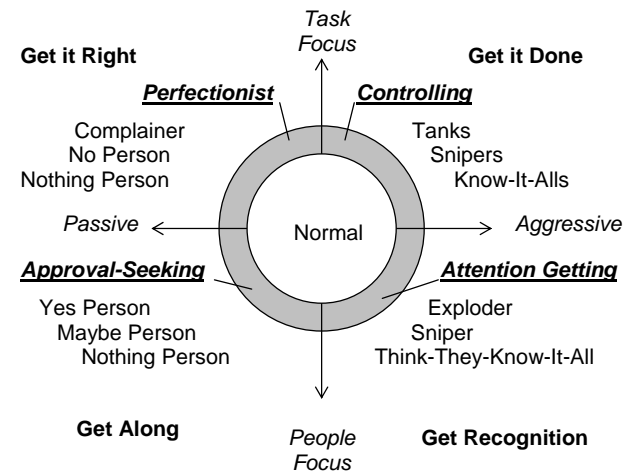
People become Difficult People, according to Bramson’s *Coping With Difficult People*, when they have adopted behaviors in the gray area and beyond as part of their own normal repertoire. When Getting It Done trumps all other intents almost always, and when Controlling behaviors have become the routine, you have a difficult person: A Tank, a Sniper or a Know It All. Each of these uses different sets of behaviors to achieve control, but the basic intent for all is the same. The drive to Get It Done has run amok.

The Tank is the Controlling person who has learned that outright domination of the other is the best way to get things done. A sneakier mode of Controlling is to undercut the other’s credibility, authority or self-confidence by the use of put-downs. This is the strategy the Sniper uses to Control his world. Know-It-

Alls control the world by controlling what information is permitted in a conversation or decision-making process. Usually only his own information is allowed.

Similarly, when the intent to Get It Right is more pronounced, you will see signs of **Perfectionism** in a person. The perfectionist tendency, if adopted as a person's dominant way of operating, can lead one to become a Complainer, one for whom the real world can never match up to his ideals, no matter what. The No Person is the one whose perfectionism has convinced him that there will always be flaws, usually so grave that innovation is unreasonable. The perfectionist-gone-wild who has learned to cope with the tragically flawed world by participating in it as little as possible: the Nothing Person.

When the Get Along intent goes to extremes in someone, they demonstrate **Approval-Seeking** behaviors. All other intents are subordinate to the intent to please other people. When this goes to extremes, you may end up with a Yes Person, who will always agree about anything or to do anything. But wait a little while and see if there is follow-through action on the agreement. The Maybe Person hates making decisions because he believes that any decision could make him the bad guy, alienating him from someone, and this should at all costs be avoided. There is a version of the Nothing Person whose twisted drive for approval motivates her to be as silent and invisible as possible—to avoid offending anyone else.



When the intent to Get Recognition is exaggerated, it becomes the drive to **Seek Attention**, be it positive or negative attention. The Exploder has learned that his outbursts of adult-sized tantrums are very successful at gaining him some attention. There are Snipers who use their witty skills to satisfy their imbalanced drive for attention. By acting like they know what they are talking about, Think-They-Know-It-Alls dupe enough people that at least some of the time the attention they get is positive. Their goal of gaining attention is satisfied any time someone will give them a hearing.

Remember, the basic intents behind the behavior of these difficult people are normal and shared by all of us. When one's intent becomes an exaggerated drive and the related behaviors become their *modus operandi*, a difficult person is born. Understanding these basic intents gives us clues for coping with difficult people. But before we look at action steps for taking on each type of person, let's look more closely at some of the tools you'll need.

Comprehension Questions:

- 15. These are examples of Controlling types of difficult people:
 A. Complainers, Snipers, Tanks
 B. No People, Yes People, Know-It-Alls
 C. Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers
 D. Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Tanks
- 16. These are examples of Attention Seeking types of difficult people:
 A. Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers
 B. Yes People, No People, Maybe People
 C. Yes People, No People, Nothing People
 D. Complainers, Tanks, Snipers
- 17. These are examples of Approval Seeking types of difficult people:
 A. Snipers, Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls
 B. Yes People, Maybe People, Nothing People
 C. Complainers, Snipers, Tanks
 D. Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Tanks
- 18. These are examples of Perfectionist types of difficult people:
 A. Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Yes People
 B. Nothing People, No People, Complainers
 C. Tanks, Nothing People, Snipers
 D. Complainers, No People, Know-It-Alls

Answers:
 15-D; 16-A; 17-B; 18-B. See Discussion of Quiz, p. XX

3. Communication Techniques

There are several communication techniques that serve us well in working with difficult people. Fortunately, we don't have to wait for a difficult person

to come into our lives to practice these skills. In this section we will consider these skills, and then later on we'll see how these techniques are applied in coping with difficult people.

Blending

Focus Question:

How can I "blend" with another individual to increase his trust or responsiveness to me?

Blending is the use of any behavior which reduces the difference between you and the other. Blending establishes common ground and increases trust and rapport.

Blending comes automatically in relationships with people we like or respect. For example, when I notice I have begun using the word "stink" as an expletive – same as my friend Karl does – that is blending. When I talk on the phone to my California-born friend who now lives in Alabama and hear his southern accent – his accent is an example of blending with his new friends in Montgomery. When I see my cousin's toddler son learn to walk with the same limp as his amputee grandfather – the boy's gait is an example of blending.

While blending comes unconsciously among friends, we do not blend so readily with people we don't like, people we are in conflict with. More commonly, in fact, we exaggerate differences with those we are in conflict with. Blending is a fundamental skill for communication. Without it, other communication skills for dealing with difficult people will be much less effective. In order to make use of this valuable communication technique, let's look at it more closely.

Blending in Speech

Matching the other's speech will, remarkably, establish a kind of trust that will make it easier for the difficult person to listen to you. This does not always mean to take on the regional accent of the other; that could appear to be an offense in some cases. But blending means at least:

- When addressing those who speak rapidly, speak rapidly.
- When addressing those who speak slowly speak slowly.
- When addressing those who speak softly, speak softly.
- When addressing those who speak loudly, speak loudly.

Behind this practice is the idea that those who, for example, speak quickly like rapid speech. They are more comfortable with it. Messages delivered with rapid speech are more likely to be received.

Experiment:

Who do you know that tends to speak at a different speed or a different volume from you? Next time you are in conversation with one of these people, try to match them in speed and volume of speech.

Blending in Movements and Facial Expressions

There is a great variety among individuals in how they move their bodies while they converse. Here are some people I know:

- Grady tends to make gestures big enough to bob his whole body up and down with almost everything he says.
- Eric tends to sit still while he talks, speaking with his mouth only.
- Dee says almost everything she says, even when relating sad events, with at least a trace of a smile on her face.
- Yvonne tends not to smile much at all.

The toddler who learned to walk with his grandfather's limp blended unconsciously. So do we all blend in this body motion manner, automatically, with people we like. When I talk with my friend Grady, I am likely to bounce a little as I swing my arms in wide gestures similar to his. I'm not as close to Dee as I am to Grady, but when I talk to Dee I think I smile a little more than usual. Blending is not being "untrue to ourselves." It is a normal part of human behavior. When we blend, it is as if we are expressing that we share common ground, that we trust each other.

Non-verbal blending might involve these behaviors and others:

- Talking with hands, gesturing
- Smiling, grimacing
- Raising or lowering eyebrows.
- Standing, sitting
- Sitting upright, slouching back

Becoming aware of how this blending happens is the first step to being able to use blending consciously to your advantage in working with difficult people.

Experiment:

Go through your normal day watching for how people blend with each other. What specific motions, postures, expressions do you see people mirror to each other? If you see people in conflict, watch for a display of "non-blending" behavior.

Comprehension Question:

19. Which of these behaviors might be performed as an act of blending?

- A. Ordering lobster at a restaurant
- B. Smiling
- C. Gesturing

- D. Speaking more rapidly
- E. All of the above

Answer:
19-E. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

Listening

Focus Question:

What are the elements of effective listening?

All of us – not just difficult people – want to be heard and understood. If I am in conflict with someone, I want to be heard and understood both emotionally and intellectually. If the other has used good listening skills, I will come to a point of believing that the other clearly understands my problem and how I feel about it. Coping with difficult people, however, requires you to put the other first. The difficult person will not listen to you until you have listened to him. (The non-mutuality of the relationship, the fact that you must open the listening ear first, is part of what makes the other person difficult.)

What do you do to help the other believe you have heard them out? What steps can you follow?

1. **Look at the other.** It is hard to believe someone is listening to me if they are not looking at me.
2. **Blend.** This is difficult. But you must put yourself through this to move the relationship forward or resolve the conflict. Even if you and a dozen witnesses know what the person is saying is dead wrong, at this point your job is not to show signs of disbelief or an intent to contradict. If the other wrinkles his brow in anger as he relates a situation, you might wrinkle your brow as well, demonstrating that you have understood the person's feelings of anger. You blending shows that you are seeing the world through his point of view – and at least for the moment you are genuinely trying to.
3. **Make sounds of acknowledgement.** These sounds might be anything from “Hmm,” “Uh-huh,” “Wow” to repeating a word or phrase the other has said.
4. **Backtrack.** You may be familiar with active listening, in which the listener paraphrases the words of the speaker. Backtracking repeats the speaker's very own words. The advantage of repeating the speaker's words rather than paraphrasing is that the speaker does not have to evaluate your paraphrase to see if you really got it right. Some difficult people, especially the Know-It-All, could spend the whole day

whittling on your paraphrase to make sure it was just right.

When your difficult person seems to be sliding into tangents, you can backtrack to bring them closer to the immediate situation. Go back to a point in the discussion when you are sure the other was still on the trail. Repeat some of the speaker's words from that part of the discussion. Usually the speaker will resume at that point, and possibly stay on track for a little while.

5. **Ask for more.** When the speaker seems to be finished, ask “Is there anything else?” Some people will have more to say when you ask for it. When they come to a stopping place again, ask again, “Anything else?” Repeat until your speaker has said that is all.
6. **Ask clarifying questions.** Up to this point, your person might have said some things that were hard to follow. Ask the classic questions to get the information about this person's problem: **Who, did What, Where, to Whom, How?** In some situations, a difficult person will feel like you are grilling him for answers when you ask for such details. And sometimes you will in fact be poking strategically at the difficult person. But you must develop the skill of asking these questions genuinely, to demonstrate your desire to understand. Use a neutral tone of voice, not an “I'm going to catch you in a lie” tone.
7. **Summarize.** After looking, blending, acknowledging, backtracking asking for more and clarifying, you can summarize what you have learned about the problem the person perceives and how the person feels about it.

All seven of these steps combine to make very good listening practices. The speaker will “feel listened to,” and that you understand both his perception of a situation and how he feels about it.

It is no small thing to put aside your own perceptions of an event or relationship for a while and enter in to someone else's world to see it from his perspective. Especially when that someone is a person you don't like! That other world might seem like a dark and twisting tunnel. But coping with the difficult person, advancing to a more successful working relationship, requires you to pass through that strange dark place.

Comprehension Question:

20. In this exchange, which listening skill does Jill demonstrate?

NED: I'm fed up with the same old treatment I'm getting every day. I think it's time for me to start looking elsewhere.

JILL: Fed up.

- A. Looking at the other
- B. Blending
- C. Backtracking

D. Asking for more

Answer:
20-C. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

Identify Positive Intent

In an organization I worked in at one time, we had a campaign to catch our co-workers doing something right – counter to the norm of catching people doing something wrong. For a couple months we passed out pins with the message “I was caught doing something right” to those who did something right. We gave these pins to peers, to those we supervised and even to our superiors. When we gave a pin, we told the person what we had seen them do well. I’m not big on wearing pins or on such gimmicky activities. But the wisdom behind the campaign is valuable: You will get more cooperation from people when you recognize them for the positive intent of their behavior – even if the result of that behavior was negative.

Here is an example from family life. The four-year-old drops the milk jug, creating a large pool of milk on the kitchen floor. He gets a rag, and as he wipes the rag on the spill, actually pushes a lot of the milk under the refrigerator. Dad walks into the kitchen and sees this happening. He puts his hand on the child’s hand and the rag to stop more milk from going under the fridge. “Thank you, Angel, for wanting to clean up the spill. I really appreciate how responsible you are becoming.” Then he points out the problem with the child’s technique and demonstrates good technique. Angel was making the mess bigger than ever by pushing milk under the fridge. Dad has recognized Angel’s desire, her willingness to clean up the mess. He recognized her positive intent.

In dealing with a difficult person, you may have trouble finding some positive intent in his behavior. Remember the four basic intents we described earlier:

- Get it done
- Get it right
- Get along
- Get recognition

Review these in your mind and consider if one or more of them might apply to the person. One of these is probably behind the difficult behavior. If you are not sure, guess. Nothing can make a person more willing to cooperate with you than telling them that you affirm their goal.

Comprehension Questions

21. Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, “Thank you for providing this information. The more we can exchange information like this, the better our relationships will be over the long run.”

- A. Get it done
- B. Get it right
- C. Get along
- D. Get recognition

22. Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, “Thank you for providing this information. This will help us complete our investigation promptly.”

- A. Get it done
- B. Get it right
- C. Get along
- D. Get recognition

23. Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, “Thank you for providing this information. I really appreciate your contributions.”

- A. Get it done
- B. Get it right
- C. Get along
- D. Get recognition

24. Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, “Thank you for providing this information. The accuracy of our report is extremely important.”

- A. Get it done
- B. Get it right
- C. Get along
- D. Get recognition

Answers:
21-C; 22-A; 23-D; 24-B. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

Identify Highly Valued Criteria

Rachel and Jack had an argument about how to spend a week’s vacation with their kids. Jack wanted to go to his aunt’s cabin in the mountains. Rachel wanted to take the kids to Disneyland. The kids wanted the parents to stop arguing, but they didn’t stop for a long time. When vacation time came, the kids spent half the week in the mountains with their dad (Rachel stayed home and rolled her eyes whenever someone asked about Jack and the kids) and half the week on the Disneyland trip with their mom (Jack stayed home and spit vinegar every time someone asked about Rachel and the kids). Unfortunately, Jack and Rachel’s planning conversation had degenerated to this sour outcome. Neither of them had asked the other in a genuinely interested way about why they preferred a particular vacation plan.

The highly valued criteria are what make an idea or experience appeal to a person and make it worth defending. Jack’s highly valued criteria was to save some money and to show the kids some places that were special to him as a kid. Rachel’s criteria for the vacation was to do something very different and exciting the kids had not done before.

If you wanted to push a discussion toward an argument, you could ask, “Why in the world would you want to do that?” The “in the world” part, and the sarcastic tone that probably comes out with it, show a lack of respect for the other person’s opinions. This is not your goal in working successfully with difficult people.

Before a discussion spirals downhill too far into an argument, ask, in a neutral tone of genuine interest, “Why do you think that is the best [... choice, plan, idea, etc.]?” And be ready to use your listening skills to receive the person’s answer. This simple question can help you avoid an argument. It is often useful and may even come naturally in conversations with people you like. This technique has special strategic value in dealing with some difficult people, as we’ll see later.

Fortunately, you can practice all of these communication techniques before your run in with your least favorite person at work. The same skills can be useful in low-intensity situations at work, at home in the community. Practice the techniques when the stakes are low, and you’ll be able to stand more firmly when you take on the Tank, Sniper or Grenade at work.

Comprehension Question:

25. “Identifying highly valued criteria” means...

- A. naming the ideals a perfectionist holds to.
- B. making explicit the reasons one believes an idea is good.
- C. avoiding an argument at all costs.
- D. listening carefully to the other person even though he’s arguing with you.
- E. all of the above.

Answer:

25-B. See Discussion of Quiz, p. XX

4. Working with Controlling Types

Focus Question:

What are my goals and strategies for working with Snipers, Tanks, and Know-It-Alls?

These task-oriented aggressive people—Snipers, Tanks and Know-It-Alls—each has developed a different strategy for asserting control. Each tends to respond well to those who stand up to them. But the ways you stand up is as different as their varied control strategies.

Working with Snipers—Reveal and Disarm

Just like snipers using guns take cover in a strategic safe position, the Sniper whose weapons are insults and sarcasm hide themselves in the social

conventions of niceness. The Sniper who in a meeting says, “Who could have come up with such a stupid idea?” and then grins broadly as if it were a joke is taking a pot-shot at the person who proposed the idea. The Sniper expects the politeness of others to cover him by smiling along with him. Once exposed, however, the sniper can be quickly disarmed. Your goal for dealing with a Sniper is to get him out in the open and then disarm him. Here are your action steps:

1. Surface the attack
2. Get group confirmation
3. Deal with the problems

Surface the Attack

In a team discussion at work, Frank is explaining a problem that is occurring more often on the job over the last couple months. Dirk blurts out with a grin, “My *dog* could figure out what to do about that!” Clearly this is a shot at Frank, and a typical response is for Frank and the others to laugh it off. But Frank, tired of such comments, does not laugh it off this time.

“That sounded like a put-down. Was it?” asks Frank in a neutral tone of voice.

Dirk is about to be exposed. He has two choices. He can continue to laugh and say no, it wasn’t a put-down. Or he can give a fuller explanation of what he has said.

By using a question, Frank has given the Sniper a sense of control, the thing the Sniper craves, but the question narrows and directs the Sniper’s control. On the other hand, consider the options Dirk has if Frank says, “That was a put-down. I’m tired of your put-downs.” There is a good chance Dirk would either take another shot at Frank (“Can’t take a little fun?”).

Other kinds of questions can be useful for exposing the Sniper:

- “When you rolled your eyes just now, what did you mean by that?”
- “Why did you make a thumbs-down gesture as I was explaining my idea?”
- “Did you intend to sound sarcastic when you said that?”

These are not polite questions, and people who function primarily in the Get Along mode may have trouble with these. But this is the first and most strategic step in dealing with the Sniper.

Get Group Confirmation

- “My *dog* could figure out what to do about that!”
- “That sounded like a put-down. Was it?”

“Well, it is pretty simple,” says Dirk, and he goes on to explain why the problem is so small.
“How does that sound to the rest of you?” Frank asks the others in the team.

Remember, the Sniper’s cover is based on tacit agreements among members of a group—agreements about politeness. Here Frank uses the group power that enabled the Sniper to confirm or deny the value of Dirk’s ideas. By including others in the conversation, Frank also frames the incident as something other than a Frank-Dirk feud. Dirk now has to deal with the opinions of others in the group, rather than simply aiming at Frank. They say there is strength in numbers. Frank is in a stronger position by bringing others along into his dealings with Dirk.

Let’s look at the alternatives. Dirk explains his ideas. 1) Frank, without consulting others, goes along with them. Dirk scores a victory for his sniping strategy as a means of control. His negative behavior is rewarded. Or 2), after Dirk explain his ideas, Frank, without consulting others, rejects Dirk’s ideas. Dirk fires off another shot of ridicule at Frank. Or, Dirk takes on the behavior of his controlling, hostile-aggressive cousin the Tank, and makes a blunt frontal attack on Frank. These negative outcomes to the shootout can all usually be avoided by including the opinions of others present in the conversation with the Sniper.

Deal With the Problem

Let’s say the group affirms that there really was merit in Dirk’s ideas for solving the problem Frank brought up. If that is the case – Snipers can be intelligent, perceptive and creative people – then work honestly as a group, listening, asking probing questions and so on to make Dirk’s idea, or maybe the ideas that Dirk’s idea gives birth to in the team discussion, a practical reality.

This outcome does not reinforce the negative behavior in the same way it would if Frank, without group consultation, had accepted Dirk’s idea. And once exposed, most Snipers stop their negative behavior, at least around the person who has exposed them.

The Attention-Seeking Sniper

Many Snipers have control issues as the source of their negative behavior. Some people turn to sniping, though, as a means of getting attention. If, over the days and weeks at work you discern that the Sniper among you is Seeking Attention, your strategy is mostly the same as for the Controlling Sniper. It may be especially useful in the Deal With the Problem phase to say something like this: “We really need everyone’s ideas to be as successful as possible here. I hope in the future you know that your ideas are welcome and that you may bring them up without the use of ridicule or sarcasm.” In saying this you

are recognizing the intent to Get Recognition, but directing it to function more positively.

Comprehension Questions:

25. Asking directly whether a remark was intended as a put-down upsets the Sniper’s routine because...
A. it gives him too much recognition.
B. there is strength in numbers.
C. he has been planning to take control for a long time.
D. he expects “more polite” behavior from the victim and bystanders.

Answer:

25-D. See Discussion of Quiz on p. 50-57.

Working with Tanks—Command Respect

The Tank has learned that people will submit when intimidated. As experienced in this behavior as he is, you probably will not be able to win by launching a counter-attack of vehement accusations. When attacked by a tank, your goal is to command respect. Here are your action steps:

1. Hold your ground
2. Give him time to run down.
3. Interrupt the attack.
4. Backtrack to the main point.
5. State your own perceptions and opinions forcefully.
6. Leave the door open.

Hold Your Ground

As the Tank powers toward you, his accusing finger stretched out like a cannon in front of him, stay put. If you are seated, remain seated. Standing up may be perceived as preparation for a counter-attack. If you are standing, remain standing. Sitting down may be perceived as weakening of your knees, and this “sign of weakness” will encourage the Tank. Look the Tank in the eye.

Give the Tank some time to run out of energy. Though it may seem the Tank does not have limitless fuel and ammunition, he does not. There will come a time when the intensity of the attack lessens. Wait for that decrease in intensity. Already, by not jumping for cover, by looking him in the eye, and by not counter-attacking, you may have begun to set the Tank off balance.

Get Their Attention

But don’t wait, necessarily for the Tank to stop. Interrupt the Tank’s attack when you sense the Tank’s energy going down. By this time you should have heard the Tank’s main problem. You will continue to command the Tank’s

respect by respectfully interrupting at this point. “Rudy, Rudy, Rudy, Rudy...” Use the Tank’s name or title, addressing him as you do in normal conversation. If you normally refer to the person as Rudy, **do not give the impression of weakening** by addressing him as “Mr. Buchser.” You tone is respectful as you repeat the name, and loud enough to be heard (blending). Repeat the name as many times as it takes until there is a brief pause – the Tank is getting ready to pay attention – where you can jump in.

“Rudy. Rudy. Rudy. Rudy...”

“Don’t interrupt me! I’m talking!”

“Rudy. Rudy...”

“You need to...”

“Rudy...”

“I’m...”

“Rudy, you think I’ve been doing a lousy job with the rate of rejects in production.”

State Your Perceptions Forcefully

Jump in backtracking. Repeat back some of the Tank’s words that might represent his central complaint. Then, continue immediately by stating your own perceptions or opinions, *as your own*: “I guess I disagree. I think that given the quality of the materials we’ve been getting lately and the speed we’ve been working at, the scrap rate OK.” You must be concise, because the Tank’s attention span is not usually longer than two sentences. Your tone, though respectful, is forceful as you speak at a speed and volume similar to the Tank.

If you live most of the time with the basic intent to Get Along, these actions may feel terribly violent to you. But to the Tank they are within the bounds of normal give-and-take. You have one more step to make, quickly, to make sure the Tank does not feel confined. You must show the Tank a door to continued conversation on the subject of the attack. “I’ll be glad to discuss this further when we can do so respectfully.” “The ideas in my proposal may have their weaknesses. But now I expect you to listen to my presentation. And then we can discuss the value of the proposal.”

Comprehension Question:

26. What is the impact on the attacking Tank of not moving away, looking the Tank in the eye and interrupting him?

- A. It makes him run away.
- B. It makes him angrier.
- C. It earns his respect.
- D. It forces him to schedule a meeting with his victim.

Answer:

26-C. See Discussion of Quiz on p. 50-57

Working With Know-It-Alls—Help Them See Other Options

The Know-It-All controls by asserting, even flaunting, his expertise. His expertise is genuine, but the tragic flaw of the Know-It-All is that he believes no one else has anything to contribute to his ideas about how things could operate. Your goal, then, is to help the Know-It-All see other options. Here is your action plan:

1. Be prepared and know your stuff.
2. Backtrack respectfully.
3. Blend with their doubts and desires.
4. Present your views indirectly.
5. Turn the Know-It-All into a mentor.

Be Prepared

The Know-It-All does in fact have an area of knowledge or skill in which he is expert. For you to win a hearing for other ideas, you will have to demonstrate your knowledge of the area as well. If your organization has a high-stakes decision to make, you may find it worthwhile to invest some extra time in building your knowledge on issues related to the decision.

The Know-It-All will quickly dismiss any suggestion coming from anyone who has not yet entered into his “circle of experts”—a circle that usually include no one but himself. In discussing a matter, the slightest factual error can exclude you from entry into that circle. Do your homework. Be prepared.

Backtrack Respectfully

If the Know-It-All is presenting his ideas and it becomes your turn to speak, begin by backtracking. No one has more patience with backtracking than the Know-It-All. He delights in knowing that you were listening to him and have grasped his information. You must do this thorough backtracking before you bring up any new ideas or information.

Blend With Their Desires

The genuine Know-It-All believes in his ideas. In the course of describing them, it is very likely he told you the criteria, the reasons, that his ideas are so good. “We must not create email dependencies,” repeated a Know-It-All on a database project I once worked on. “Certainly we don’t want to create email dependencies, Douglas,” I might affirm before suggesting a new idea about how users could get information.

Present your views indirectly

“Certainly we don’t want to create email dependencies, Douglas. So *what do you think might happen if we gave users accounts to log in at our website and get that information?*” The new idea is presented very indirectly, even as a question, a very hypothetical question.

Other terms that keep your suggestion indirect:

“Maybe...”

“Perhaps...”

“This may be off-base, but...”

“I was just wondering...”

“What if....Does that make any sense?”

If the Know-It-All senses a challenge to his expertise, he will shut you down in nothing flat. But by presenting alternatives in this weak, indirect manner, you demonstrate recognition of the Know-It-All’s expertise. You have a chance of being heard.

This takes time and patience on your part. It may seem that standing up to the Know-It-All requires you to bow down to his ego. And this is correct. This is what it can take to come into a more productive working relationship with the Know-It-All. But if you really are committed to making things work in the long haul, consider this....

Turn the Know-It-All Into a Mentor

Few things will honor the Know-It-All more than for you to ask him to teach you what he knows. And then, as your expertise continues to increase, the Know-It-All becomes increasingly open to hearing new ideas from you and your co-workers.

Comprehension Questions:

27. Present your ideas to the Know-It-All...

- A. very indirectly.
- B. after extensive backtracking.
- C. forcefully.
- D. All of the above.
- E. A and B are the best answers.

Answer:

27-E. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

5. The Approval-Seeking Types

Focus Question:

What are my goals and strategies for working with Yes People, Maybe People, and Nothing People?

The Approval-Seeking Difficult people—Yes People, Maybe People, and Nothing People—share a common drive. You will see how taking personal time with each of these very people-oriented people is a key to creating a satisfactory working relationship.

Working with Yes People—Get Commitments

When the intent to Get Along becomes exaggerated, you might get a person whose drive for pleasing others motivates him never to say No, even though this person may already be overcommitted or have other conflicts. He doesn’t follow through with what he says. While you feel frustrated with the lack of follow-through, he feels resentful that he has so much to do, the impossible situation of fulfilling all the commitments he has made. Your goal in coping with a Yes Person at work is to get commitments from the Yes Person that you can be confident will be fulfilled. Your action steps:

1. Make it safe to be honest
2. Help them learn to plan
3. Ensure commitment
4. Strengthen the relationship

Make It Safe to Be Honest

When your work duties require you to depend on the Yes person, you will need to initiate a conversation in which the Yes Person feels safe. Karen is responsible for publishing her organization’s newsletter. Watch how Karen works with Jim, who, once again, has caused the newsletter’s publication to be delayed because he did not have the workshop schedule finalized in time:

KAREN: Jim, I need to talk with you about your scheduling of workshops. When is a good time?

JIM: Well, I guess now is as good a time as any.

KAREN: [*Sitting with Jim in his cubicle. Smiles back at Jim.*]

Jim, we’ve both been working here quite a while. You’re a nice guy, and I value our working relationship. I appreciate that you are always willing to help out anyone else in the office who needs something.

First, notice how Karen initiated the conversation. She told Jim exactly, honestly, what she wants to discuss and she asked Jim to identify a time for this conversation. As a Yes Person, Jim is always ready to drop everything and serve the other. But Karen’s technique of stating the issue and asking the time is useful for initiating a potentially difficult conversation with anyone.

Notice too Karen's sitting and smiling to blend with Jim. Then, she feeds Jim's intent to Get Along by affirming his value to her: "nice guy...I value...I appreciate..." She recognizes his intent to be helpful (without comment as to whether he really is!). So far this is completely person-oriented, rather than task-oriented. But at this point, Karen has established a climate in which she can introduce the task:

KAREN: I know you fully intended to have the workshop schedule finalized before the newsletter deadline. And I know some emergencies came up that delayed your work. What was hard for me was that I had no warning before the due date that your part would be late. If I had, I could have rescheduled with the printer and maybe found some way to help you finish on time. Look, I want us to be able to depend on each other in our relationship in the future, and for that to be, we need to be open and honest with each other. You can be honest with me. I'm not out to get you. Can I be honest with you?

JIM: I'm really, really sorry about missing that deadline. It wasn't my fault. A lot of things came up. I don't think you understand.

KAREN: I want to understand. I'm hoping that if we come at this together we can learn some things and both come out better in the future.

Now Karen again affirms Jim's positive intent. Then she states the impact Jim's lateness had on her work. Then she returns to the person-oriented, mentioning "our relationship," and affirming his value to her ("I'm not out to get you.") Karen backtracks, repeating Jim's word, "understand," and points to shared interests by using "we" and "both."

KAREN: So what happened over the last couple weeks that interfered with your finishing the schedule?

JIM: Well, I had some customer complaints to deal with, some of them pretty hairy. And Carol and I also had that report to the state to get done. The remodeling of the office next door was really distracting, with the workers pounding and stuff. I didn't feel like I could get on the phone to make the calls I needed to to set the schedule. And you know how cramped we are in here; it's not like there was another desk where I could get on the phone. I couldn't ask Carol because she was working so hard on the state report.

KAREN: Wow! You had a lot up against you! Did you ask *anyone* for help?

JIM: No. It seemed like everyone was too busy.

KAREN: Well, no wonder you felt overwhelmed. You must have felt like you were all alone with a big project. Thank you for being honest with me.

Karen does not get on Jim's case for making excuses. She listens to Jim's account of the situation and shows understanding of his feelings. And she thanks Jim for his honesty. Expressing appreciation for the Yes Person's honesty can help you get more honesty in the future.

Help Them Learn To Plan

You might say, if you are not Jim's supervisor or in a training role in your organization, that it's not your job to teach Jim how to plan. But if you have been frustrated more than once with this Yes Person's unkept promises, you could turn your frustration into action. Besides, having taken the time to build trust with the Yes Person, you could be in an ideal position to help him learn some new skills. See how Karen approaches this:

KAREN: Jim, think back over the last three weeks before the schedule was due. If you could change anything about how things unfolded during that time, what would it be?

The past failure can provide a framework for learning for the future. And maybe, just maybe Karen will have less to be frustrated about.

There are lots of good time management systems and tools out there. Helping the Yes Person learn better time management can be an asset to everyone around him.

Be Personal

The basic intent of the Yes Person is to Get Along. In the long run, you can "fill the tank" of this person by demonstrating personal interest occasionally. Asking about family, hobbies, books, anything you have heard the person mention will help this person feel that he is getting along with you, and will help keep the lines of honest and trusting communication open.

Comprehension Question:

28. Which set of actions is most likely to make it safe for the Yes Person to be honest?

- A. reminding of performance criteria, helping him to plan, reviewing a recent failure
- B. asking about family, helping him to plan, reviewing a recent failure
- C. blending, expressing value in the relationship, affirming positive intent
- D. blending, giving stern looks, reminding of performance criteria

Answer:

28-C. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

Working With Maybe People—Get Them to Decide

One of the most irritating situations in the workplace is to have a boss who is indecisive—a Maybe Person. The Maybe Person believes that to make a decision is to risk offending, an action in conflict with his exaggerated drive to Get Along. Your goal is to get them to make decisions, and ultimately to think decisively. Here is your action plan:

1. Establish a comfort zone
2. Use a decision-making process
3. Reassure and then ensure follow-up
4. Strengthen the relationship

Establish a Comfort Zone

Remember all the relationship-focused listening, blending and reassuring Karen did with Jim, the Yes Person? That same kind of approach is right for the Maybe Person, who is also a Get Along type. Additionally, you must increase the Maybe Person's comfort toward making a decision.

"I'm sure there are really good reasons you haven't decided yet. I want you to know that I will respect your decision, whatever it is, and support you as we implement it. So please don't worry about my opinions."

You might go on, in some cases, with this: "I will not make this decision for you, but if you like I will help you think it through. I would keep our conversation confidential, of course."

Why not just bully him along until he decides? Because another bully may come along after you and he'll change his decision. Remember, the name of the game for the Maybe Person is Getting Along, and that means getting along with whoever is in front of him right now. Your assurance of respect for his decision is an important part of increasing his comfort and ability to make a decision and sticking with it.

Use a Decision-Making Process

If your Maybe Person accepts your offer to help, introduce any decision-making process you are comfortable with. This can be as simple as drawing a line down a piece of paper and listing plusses and minuses to a proposed course of action. Using some kind of process reduces any temptation you have of manipulating the outcome (but if you've been working with this Maybe Person long, you'll be happy to have *any* kind of decision made!). Writing, rather than just talking, can help the process become more concrete for the Maybe Person. And your ultimate goal is for the Maybe Person is beyond making this immediate decision. You want him to build the habit of thinking decisively. Any kind of decision-making process you introduce can further these ends.

Throughout this process of coaching the Maybe Person in how to make a decision, you keep up the warmth of tone and expression, the blending, and the listening. "Safety first."

Assure That It Is a Good Decision

"I think you've made a good decision. There is almost never a perfect decision. But you have made the best decision you could make in this situation. You have good reasons for deciding the way you did."

There are no perfect decisions? That's right, Maybe Person. No matter how long you wait. Having made a decision and received assurances like this can help the Maybe Person drop a ton of bricks off of his shoulders. Watch for the sense of relief.

Follow Up

...But don't leave the Maybe Person yet. You want to make sure that at least the first step of action is taken on the decision. So tell the Maybe Person how you will be following up:

- "I'll watch for your draft of the memo to staff this afternoon and be ready to copy and distribute it."
- "You're going to go right now to tell her about her promotion? Let me know when you've told her. I want to hear how she reacts!"
- "I'll go write up the purchase order now. I think you'll have time to sign it so we can get it out the door today."

Strengthen the Relationship

As with the Yes Person, a Maybe Person can become less difficult over time if you invest a little in the relationship. Asking about the person's interests can show that you do in fact Get Along together; your getting along is not necessarily contingent on his making business decisions in line with your opinions.

Comprehension Question:

29. Which of these will probably increase the Maybe Person's comfort level with making a decision?
- A. Push him to make the decision you know is best.
 - B. Remind him that his decision must be perfect, because it will effect a lot of people for a long time.
 - C. Help him use a decision making process.
 - D. Assure him that his decision will not interfere with your relationship.

Answer:

29-D. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

Working With the Nothing Person—Get Them to Talk

There are two varieties of Nothing People. One is grounded in the Get Along/Seek Approval dimension, the other in the Get It Right/Perfectionist dimension. The first has determined that the best way to get along, the best way not to rock anybody's boat, is to be as silent and invisible as possible. The other has concluded that all engagement is futile, it is impossible to make things anywhere near the perfect ideal. Your goal is the same with both, to get the Nothing Person open, to persuade him to talk. Your action plan:

1. Plan enough time.
2. Ask open ended questions expectantly.
3. Guess.

Plan Enough Time

If the Nothing Person really has information that you need, then you need to plan an appropriate amount of time to get it. These people, highly tolerant of silence, can probably wait you out until you leave them alone. Plan an amount of time and state it at the beginning of the interaction. "I'd like to talk with you about the progress you are making, and I have 15 minutes available."

Stating the expectation this way helps both of you. It helps you, because you know at the outset that the potentially conversationless time will indeed have an endpoint. This is a matter of guarding your own frustration level. Having a scheduled stop time also keeps you in control of the ending of the meeting, rather than the Nothing Person simply waiting you out. It is also good "counseling strategy." Many therapists have observed that the final ten minutes of a one hour session can be the most productive. Clients are often more forthcoming when they know the clock is ticking and the time is almost up.

If you have a subordinate on the job who is a Nothing Person, you may find it advantageous to schedule your meetings with that person for 15 minutes each week, rather than the monthly hour you might dedicate to other one-on-one staff meetings. This increases the person's opportunity to talk.

Ask open-ended questions expectantly

Avoid asking a question that can be answered with a nod, a grunt, a yes or a no. "How is the progress on your project?" is much better than "Are you almost finished with your project?" The classic question words, Who, What When, Where, Why and How, are the first words of your questions to the Nothing Person.

When you pose these questions, you put on the Expectant Look. This look comes naturally to you when you anticipate a response from someone: eyes open wide, eyebrows up, chin up, mouth open slightly, slight forward lean. You may have learned not to adopt this look when you attempt to interact with

your Nothing Person. So it is important to consciously put it on. It can make all the difference in the world, more difference than the questions you ask. Try putting on the Expectant Look right now.

Also, you usually blend with silence not with saline(!) but with a slower rate of speech.

Your Nothing Person might start talking. But if not, what do you do next?

Hold the Expectant Look. You may be tempted to fill in the silence. Don't Hold the Look longer than you would normally. Hold it until you feel a sense of resistance, that the Nothing Person is waiting you out. Then ask again:

"Just now I asked you how you were progressing on your project, and you didn't answer. I'm still wondering about your progress." Once again put on the Expectant Look.

When the Nothing Person first goes verbal, his favorite words are "Nothing" and "I don't know." If you get a "Nothing," ask, "What else?" If you get an "I don't know," try one of these:

- "Make something up."
- "Guess."
- "If you did know, what would it be?"

...And of course put on the Expectant Look. Your Nothing Person might start talking. But if not, what do you do next?

Guess

Make some guesses about the answer to the question you have asked, about the person's reasons for silence, or about both.

I'm going to guess. You are completely done with the project and you're ready for your next assignment. You would be finished by now, but Silvia was out sick last week. You still are just beginning and you have found it will take an additional \$25,000 to complete, so you are being quiet, afraid I'll be mad about the additional expense. You are being quiet because you are embarrassed about your progress. You are being quiet because you are angry with me for even assuming you might not be done."

This guessing strategy might work for either of these reasons. If your guesses hit the Nothing Person's funny bone, humor may crack him open. Or, if you notice a change in the person's nonverbal behavior—he stops tapping his fingers, his facial expression changes, he shifts in his chair—you may be onto

something. You get more information (though incomplete information) about the persons thinking or feeling. Either hitting the nail on the head or missing the mark by a mile can trigger the Nothing Person to start talking.

Your Nothing Person might start talking. But if not, what do you do next?

Final Attempts

If you truly need this person's information, you may have only a few last desperate tricks in your bag to get it out. One option is to reschedule. Make it clear that he is not off the hook, but that you will see him at 2 PM to continue.

Another option is the Ghost of Christmas Future technique. Remember in Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," Ebenezer Scrooge's last visitor showed him the future as it could be if he continued his miserly and abusive ways.

For the Get It Right person you could show this future: "Fine. Don't talk. Think of how botched up things will turn out because we didn't have your input."

For the Get Along person you could show the future one of these ways: "It will be very difficult to have any kind of relationship if you continue your silence." Or, "Okay, you don't have to talk. But if we all lived in our own little worlds around here we would sure have a lot of misunderstandings and hurt feelings."

You may also have the option of describing formal grievances or disciplinary actions.

When The Nothing Person Starts Talking...

...Be grateful! Listen attentively. But hold to your time commitment.

Over the long run, if this is a Get Along Nothing Person, invest in the relationship by asking about his interests.

Comprehension Question:

30. T F In getting the Nothing Person to talk, nonverbal communication, specifically the Expectant Look (eyes open wide, eyebrows up, chin up, mouth open slightly, slight forward lean), is not as important as asking open-ended questions.

Answer:
30-F. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

6. Working With The Perfectionist Types

Focus Question:

What are my goals and strategies for working with Complainers and No People?

Both Complainers and No People seem unable to move, pinned in the jaws of defeat. The disease causing people to become Complainers and No People is highly contagious, and those afflicted can be an extreme frustration to the people around them. Both of them for the sake of productivity at work and for making your life less difficult, can use a dose of problem-solving skills.

Working With No People—Transition to Problem-Solving

"It will never work. We tried it six years ago!" The No Person is the one whose perfectionism has convinced him that there will always be flaws, usually so grave that innovation is unreasonable. All attempts to change is hopeless futility. Your goal is to get the No Person to escape futility and move to a problem-solving mode. Here is your action plan:

1. Protect your own realistic optimism.
2. Delay discussion of solutions.
3. Acknowledge good intent.
4. Catastrophize.
5. Use the negativism constructively.

Protect your own realistic optimism.

It may not take you long to identify the No Person at work. In the film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, we see more and more people become transformed into alien pod people. No People can multiply themselves just as quickly as those invaders. To protect yourself from being snatched into negativity, two strategies are recommended.

Recognize your own vulnerability to discouragement. Keep your awareness up that, like anyone else, if faced with extreme obstacles on every side, you too could come to the attitude that all things are futile. Recall your many good reasons for *not* feeling discouraged.

Never try to argue the No Person out of his negativity. You cannot win this argument. The No Person's convictions run so deep, and the perfectionism behind it all has a rationality to it that is unstoppable.

Delay Discussion of Solutions

"We tried that last year and it didn't work."

"The big boss would never approve that."

"That would be impossible with the staff and budget we have now."

The specialty of the No Person is asserting that a new idea will not or cannot work. In team discussions, then, put the No Person out of a job. Do not propose innovations, new solutions to a problem, until you have thoroughly defined the problem by asking all the WH questions: who, what, where, why, how, how many, how much, how often, etc. This is step one of a problem-solving process described at length in many other places:

1. Define the problem.
2. Identify potential solutions.
3. Evaluate the solutions
4. Choose a solution.
5. Implement the solution.
6. Plan to assess the solution.

Defining a problem clearly is a step skipped over all too often as we jump to identify solutions. The No Person will probably remain quiet during these parts of a conversation. Taking the time to define a problem will give you a better diagnosis, and so it will help you or your team come up with treatments that are more likely to work. The process can energize a person or group because the clarity achieved gives way to confidence and new ways of thinking. (vaccination against depression). And it sidelines your No Person for a while.

Catastrophize

When you have a proposed course of action that all except the No Person are comfortable pursuing, ask the No Person to Catastrophize:

“Let’s say we went ahead with this. What would be the worst possible thing that could happen?”

Sometimes once the No Person has considered the worst possible outcome, other “negative” outcomes don’t seem so bad after all. They are possibly worth risking. This maneuver of catastrophizing sometimes helps a No Person budge.

Use the negativism constructively

The story is told (in Brinkman and Kirschner’s *Dealing with People You Can’t Stand*) of the two scout leaders who were planning to take the troop on a big trip to Washington, D.C. Uncertain about whether they had planned in adequate detail to ensure a safe and successful trip, they decided to meet with a parent who they knew to be a No Person. They presented the plans to the No Person, who was able to come up with all the negative possibilities, from lost child to terrorist kidnapping of their entire bus. This conversation helped the scout leaders think of some issues they had not considered before and make some adjustments. They used the negativity of the No Person as an asset in planning.

Acknowledge good intent

Thank your No Person for his contributions. You are using his contributions positively, as a means for moving forward. “I appreciate your careful thought on this matter. I know we both want things to advance with as little difficulty as possible. You give us insights to form a more perfect plan.”

Comprehension Question:

31. When a No Person is in the conversation, what is the value of asking detailed questions to define a problem?

- A. Asking detailed questions stalls the conversation, giving you time to think of another approach.
- B. Defining the problem reduces negativity in a discussion and leads to better solutions.
- C. It is a strategy for protecting your optimism.
- D. The hard-core No Person often cannot participate much in such analysis, and so you achieve your goal of eliminating his input.

Answer:

31-B. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

Working With Complainers—Form a Problem-Solving Alliance

Complainers are not just venting some frustration; they are not trying to point out flaws in operations for the good of the organization. They are people convinced that in a world that falls short of their ideals, they are powerless to make the smallest change. The best they can do, they believe, is to point out the problems to those who are to blame. Your goal in working with Complainers is to move them into a problem-solving mode with you. Here is your action plan:

1. Listen for the main points.
2. Interrupt and get specific.
3. Shift the focus to solutions.
4. Draw the line.

Listen For the Main Points

When someone is whining at you to solve their problems, maybe the last thing you want to do is to listen to them! But this is the first thing to do when working with a Complainer. Blend. Make the “I’m listening” sounds of “un-huh,” grunting and so forth. Backtrack. Get out a pen and paper to take notes. Taking notes makes the Complainer feel better. Notes will also help you recall the main ideas so that next time you can cut to the chase more quickly and

shorten the whining session. (“Next time?” Yes I’m afraid you can’t usually reform a Complainer in just one interaction.)

Interrupt and Get Specific

Complainers excel at speaking in generalities, and seem to have limitless lung capacity. But in order to assess the severity of this person’s complaints you need some details. There is a good chance you’ll need to interrupt the Complainer. Do this respectfully, perhaps signaling with your hand your intent to interrupt, and asking a clarification question: “Wait. How often does this happen?” Just as with the No Person, the classic WH question words are required to start to define the problem, the first step in your attempt to maneuver the conversation into a problem-solving mode.

Your interrupting gives you opportunity to take more control of the conversation. Continue asking for more details to better specify the problem:

“Does this always happen every day, or just in the times when we have lots of registration money coming in?”
“How long has this been the pattern?”
“How much money is usually involved?”

A “normal person”—one who is reporting a problem in the interest of making things better—but who does not have some of the important details might respond to a detail question with, “I don’t know, I’ll look into that.” A real Complainer is more likely to respond to “How much money is usually involved?” with,

“A lot of money.”
“How much?”
“A lot.”
“How much is a lot?”
“I don’t know. But it happens every day. And another problem I’ve been seeing is....”

At this point, if you are the supervisor of the Complainer, you can assign him the task of recording how much money is involved in the problem each day for the next two weeks. If you are the Complainer’s peer, you might say, “It would be really valuable to know what the trend is. Why don’t you keep track for a while so you can report exactly how much money is involved on a daily basis.”

This move accomplishes two things. For you, the move takes the Complainer away from you for a while (about this issue at least). For the Complainer, the data collection activity is genuinely valuable for solving the problem. Taking this small step of responsibility helps the Complainer learn that he can do

something that will contribute. He is not absolutely powerless in the face of all the world’s problems.

Shift the Focus to Solutions

Once enough details are present, you and the Complainer might discover that there is no problem after all, or that the problem is quite different from what had been expected. Assuming you have a clear understanding of a real problem, move on to propose solutions to the problem, as with a No Person.

Draw the Line

There are times the Complainer does not respond. How do you cope? The germs that turn a person into a Complainer are highly contagious. You could easily become infected with this disease while spending time with a Complainer. If the Complainer gets back on a roll of whining, you just stop the interaction assertively. Stand up, go to the door, and say, “Since your problems seem to have no solutions, there is no use in our continuing to discuss them. If you come into some possible solutions in the future, I will be glad to discuss this problem again. But right now we cannot.”

“But you don’t understand...” the Complainer attempts to hook you again.

Don’t allow him to suck you in. Repeat, “If you change your mind and think there might be some solutions we can discuss it then.” Walk away.

Comprehension Question:

32. What is the value of getting a Complainer to collect information about the problem he complains about?
- A. It gives you a break from the Complainer.
 - B. It gets the Complainer moving in a problem-solving direction.
 - C. It increases the Complainer’s sense of powerlessness.
 - D. All of the above
 - E. Both A and B
 - F. Both A and C

Answer:

32-E. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

7. The Attention-Getting Types

Focus Question:

What are my goals and strategies for working with Think-They-Know-It-Alls and Grenades?

All of us can use some appreciation now and then. Grenades and Think-They-Know-It-Alls have an exaggerated need for getting attention. You will give each of these people some attention, but your initial approach to each is quite different.

Working With Think-They-Know-It-Alls—Bury Their Bad Ideas

These difficult people are an annoyance, more than anything else, unless they are in a position of authority. Then they can be dangerous. The Think-They-Know-It-All is starved for attention. He has found that he can get it by appearing to be an admirable expert on whatever subject comes up. Humiliating exposure of the Think-They-Know-It-All as a fake will promote more attention-getting behavior. Your goal, then, is to bury this person's bad ideas without burying the person. Here is your action plan:

1. Give him attention.
2. Clarify for specifics.
3. Tell an alternative truth.
4. Give him an out.

Give Him Attention

As tempting as it may be to attack a Think-They-Know-It-All when you have correct information or simply attack him because you are annoyed, this will not serve your purposes in the longer run. This person is craving attention. Filling his tank can reduce the negative behavior. How do you fill the attention tank?

1. Enthusiastic backtracking is music to the Think-They-Know-It-All's ears. In doing so you demonstrate that you are listening, and your enthusiasm blends with his. He is delighted that you should be excited about his contributions. In doing this you are not agreeing with his assertions, even though the Think-They-Know-It-All may believe you are.
2. Acknowledging positive intent—"Thank you for being willing to contribute to this conversation"—delights the Think-They-Know-It-All.

Clarify for Specifics

Think-They-Know-It-Alls can be very convincing as experts. They believe themselves to be telling the truth; there is no intent to deceive. But they cannot distinguish between the couple facts they heard on the brief radio news show with the whole body of information they are pronouncing that seems to make sense. If the Think-They-Know-It-All doesn't know himself whether he is telling the truth or not, you may not either. So this step is especially important if you are still not sure if your difficult person is a genuine expert or a balloon full of hot air.

Ask the questions that unravel the generalities: "Who is *everyone*?" "How often is *always*?" "Important *in what way*?" Your tone is important here. You

are not attacking. You are asking genuinely and using the Expectant Look described earlier. A curious tone rather than a "gotcha" tone is safer, with both the Know-It-All and the Think-They-Know-It-All. You'll know you have a fake if he hems and haws about the details. But you won't take a threatening tone. Remember, causing the Think-They-Know-It-All to lose face will result in additional negative behavior in the future.

Tell an Alternative Truth

"Hmm. The way I've heard it explained is...." "Another way to look at it would be...." "I have understood that...." If this person's version of reality does not match yours, present yours. Present yours simply as another version, even if you know it is authoritative. Referring to books, articles or other sources can show the validity of your "version."

Give Him an Out

Make it easy for the Think-They-Know-It-All to agree with you. "...But maybe you haven't seen that article?" "You were probably thinking of the older model of forklift this company made before this one. I think I read they often had trouble with the fuel line."

In the longer run, if you can give the Think-They-Know-It-All enough attention for the positive things he does do (or at least acknowledge some possible positive intent), the annoying behaviors of this person will subside. It will become easier to identify the good ideas this bright and curious person has to offer your workplace when there is a lot less "bad idea" to sift out.

Comprehension Question:

33. When asking a Think-They-Know-It-All for specifics, it is important to speak...
- A. very quickly.
 - B. with an aggressive tone.
 - C. as if you are genuinely curious.
 - D. using big words and lots of jargon.

Answer:

28-C. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

Working with Grenades—Take Control

The history of this explosive person includes the feeling of not having gotten appropriate appreciation. To get attention, the Grenade uses a strategy learned at age two—throwing a tantrum. This out-of-control state, which embarrasses the Grenade himself, must be controlled before excessive damage is done. Your goal is to get the Grenade to get control of himself. Your action plan:

1. Get his attention.
2. Aim for the heart.
3. Reduce intensity

4. Cool off time

Get Their Attention

CORY: Here's the report you've been asking me for. I stayed late last night to finish it.

KENT: Thanks. I'll look at it on the plane when I fly out tomorrow.

CORY: But you said you needed it first thing this morning. So here it is.

KENT: Thanks.

CORY: Aren't you going to read it now? Damn! I stayed late to get it to you on time! [*He's blowing up.*] I had to take the bus home in the rain cause it was late! My freaking car is in the shop...! Gas prices...and the government...! ..."

This sort of explosion has happened to Cory before at work. Kent now knows that he has a grenade in his office, Cory. Cory is out of control, and there is risk of him saying and doing things that could injure others and himself. Whether you are Kent in this exchange or just an observer of your colleagues, some one needs to help Cory regain control. First, get his attention, but how?

- Raise your voice loud enough that it can be heard over the tantrum. This might be the only time when you speak more loudly than your difficult person.
- Call his name. If you don't know the person's name, call him sir or ma'am. Or say, "Yes, that's right! You're right"
- Be sure your tone and body language do not appear hostile.

Aim For the Heart

What words do you think "pulled the pin" on Cory the Grenade, causing him to explode? Whatever Cory says between the pulling of the pin and the beginning of the explosion—that is what the immediate issue is. You probably won't get far if you start talking about the weather, car trouble, gas prices or the government. Backtrack to the immediate issue, the pin-pulling issue, the heart:

"You worked hard and late to finish the report!"

If you don't know the heart of the matter, there are generic Grenade interruption statements you can say:

"I don't want you to feel this way! There's a misunderstanding here! You don't have to feel this way!"

Reduce Intensity

If you do hit the heart, it can be surprising how quickly a Grenade will calm down. You may see the person physically shake himself as if to shake off the anger, or he may blink his eyes rapidly so that he stops seeing red. You can back off on the volume of your speech at his point.

Cool Off Time

Adrenalin is still rushing. You have an issue to address with the Grenade, but now is not the time. Back off for ten minutes, an hour, a day or a week, whatever might seem right.

If the Grenade went off in a meeting and you are in charge, call for a ten minute break. If you are not in charge of the meeting, dismiss yourself, "Excuse me. I'll be back in a few minutes." If you were alone with the Grenade, say, "I'd really like to hear you out about (the heart issue.) I'm going to go take a little break and come back in ten minutes." When you do come back, you may assess that the trauma on the Grenade himself was so great (his face is buried in his arms, he is crying, etc.) that more cooling off time is needed. "I'll check in with you sometime tomorrow," you might say.

The story is told (in Brinkman & Kirschner, *Dealing with People You Can't Stand*) of a nurse who frequently faced the tirades of a Grenade doctor who threw tantrums about the poor quality care on the nurse's floor of the hospital. "Doctor! Doctor!" she interrupted his fit. "You are very concerned with the quality of patient care on this floor! I want to hear everything you have to say about that concern, but not here, in front of staff and patients. Let's discuss this in my office." With that she turned around, marched directly to her office and waited for the doctor. By the time he arrived, he had cooled down enough to have a more respectful conversation about his concerns. And, he never yelled at the nurse again.

Comprehension Question:

34. How will you know if you have identified aloud the immediate cause of the Grenade's explosion?

- A. The episode will probably become more violent.
- B. The Grenade will start to shake off the anger.
- C. The Grenade will probably start crying.
- D. The Grenade will feel embarrassed.

Answer:

29-B. See Discussion of Quiz on p. 50-57

8. When I Am the Difficult Person

Many of us, on reading about difficult people, have an uncomfortable experience: "Oh my gosh, that's *me!*" Be thankful for that awareness! It shows you have not gone so far beyond the questionable gray zone into the

always inappropriate region beyond. What can you do with that awareness that you have bad days when you start to rely on difficult patterns?

When Getting It Done Becomes Controlling

Reflect:

Can you trust other people's ability and judgment?

What are the primary intents of those you work with? How can you use those to motivate them to Get It Done, rather than attacking?

When Getting Appreciated Becomes Seeking Attention

Reflect:

In what ways might your attention-seeking get in the way of your receiving appropriate recognition?

Where do you look (beyond the workplace to family, to friends, to relationships, to community activities, to yourself) for appropriate appreciation?

When Getting Along Becomes Seeking Approval

Reflect:

How might your approval-seeking behavior interfere with getting along with people?

How can people who do not necessarily like each other work together professionally, collegially?

When Getting It Right Becomes Perfectionism

Reflect:

How can you build problem-solving habits of mind such as clearly specifying a problem and remaining open to possible solutions?

At the end of your life, how do you want to be remembered—"He zapped people's energy and enthusiasm?" Or would you want to be remembered some other way?

Comprehension Question:

35. T F Your awareness that you can be a difficult person sometimes can help you avoid becoming a difficult person.

Answer:

35-T. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 50-57.

Summary

In this module, you have tried to understand difficult people—they have reasons for behaving as they do. And you have seen strategies for working with various types of difficult people. Fortunately, the communication skills useful in working with difficult people can be practiced with anyone, not only the difficult. Using those skills will help you from becoming a difficult person yourself.

Review Questions

1. What type of difficult person is likely to say "Sure I can do that for you. Whatever needs to be done...!" but then he rarely follows through.

- A. Complainer
- B. Sniper
- C. Nothing Person
- D. Yes Person

2. What type of difficult person is likely to say, "We could never make it work. I've been doing this a long time, and I can tell you, what you suggest is impossible."

- A. Nothing Person
- B. Sniper
- C. No Person
- D. Grenade

3. What type of difficult person is likely to tell his baseball team captain "Great job" when he strikes out with bases loaded and the game is now lost.

- A. Sniper
- B. Tank
- C. Maybe Person
- D. Know-It-All

4. "Obviously you haven't learned the intricacies of the operating system. To anyone who has, it is clear that what I'm proposing is the best solution." What difficult person is likely to say this?

- A. Yes Person
- B. Tank
- C. Complainer
- D. Know-It-All

5. You ask him a question. You wait a long time. He shrugs. Which difficult person might you be talking to?

- A. Nothing Person
- B. Grenade
- C. Think-They-Know-It-All
- D. Maybe Person

6. "Jones, I've had it up to here with your incompetence! Your reports are not just crap, they are late crap! Get to work! Use some of that brain power people say you have! And get it in on time for a change. I don't care if you have to skip your freaky vegan lunches and stay overnight eight

days a week! Get it done! No excuses!" Which difficult person might say this?

- A. Tank
- B. Grenade
- C. Complainer
- D. Think-They-Know-It-All

7. "Do it over? You want me to do it over? You don't get it, how hard I've worked on that. But then no one gets it! You don't! The big boss doesn't! My wife doesn't! The kids don't! All they care about is getting to their soccer games! Their coaches don't care! And it's getting dark so early now....!" Which difficult person might behave this way?

- A. Tank
- B. Know-It-All
- C. No Person
- D. Grenade

8. Which difficult person might say this: "Julie has been out so much lately, and I've had to pick up her work. So if I'm behind it's because of that. And the work has become more complicated with the changes we've made lately. I should tell you too that my mom has been kind of sick lately, and that's stressing me out. My computer has been acting buggy lately too."

- A. No Person
- B. Complainer
- C. Think-They-Know-It-All
- D. Sniper

9. "I'm not sure which one might be the best. Why don't you choose?" Which difficult person is likely to say this?

- A. Think-They-Know-It-All
- B. Nothing Person
- C. Yes Person
- D. Maybe Person

10. In this conversation, what kind of difficult person might Ted be?

- TED: Keeping a balance between the gauss and the hyzer is really important.
- KIM: How is it important?
- TED: Oh, you know. It makes a big difference.

- A. Think-They-Know-It-All
- B. Know-It-All
- C. Tank
- D. Maybe Person

11. T F **When I agree to do something because I value my relationship with the person who asked me, I am operating in a Get Along mode.**

12. T F **Accountants, pharmacists and engineers will be more successful if they are comfortable working in the Get It Right mode.**

13. T F **If completing a project is the most important thing to me, I am working in a Get It Done mode.**

14. T F **My wife had to work on Saturday, and when she got home showed her all the household chores I had accomplished. I was in a Get Recognized mode.**

15. **These are examples of Controlling types of difficult people:**

- A. Complainers, Snipers, Tanks
- B. No People, Yes People, Know-It-Alls
- C. Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers
- D. Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Tanks

16. **These are examples of Attention Seeking types of difficult people:**

- A. Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers
- B. Yes People, No People, Maybe People
- C. Yes People, No People, Nothing People
- D. Complainers, Tanks, Snipers

17. **These are examples of Approval Seeking types of difficult people:**

- A. Snipers, Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls
- B. Yes People, Maybe People, Nothing People
- C. Complainers, Snipers, Tanks
- D. Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Tanks

18. **These are examples of Perfectionist types of difficult people:**

- A. Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Yes People
- B. Nothing People, No People, Complainers
- C. Tanks, Nothing People, Snipers
- D. Complainers, No People, Know-It-Alls

19. **Which of these behaviors might be performed as an act of blending?**

- A. Ordering lobster at a restaurant
- B. Smiling
- C. Gesturing
- D. Speaking more rapidly
- E. All of the above

20. **In this exchange, which listening skill does Jill demonstrate?**

NED: I'm fed up with the same old treatment I'm getting every day. I think it's time for me to start looking elsewhere.

- JILL: Fed up.
- A. Looking at the other
- B. Blending
- C. Backtracking
- D. Asking for more

21. **Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, "Thank you for providing this information. The more we can exchange information like this, the better our relationships will be over the long run."**

- A. Get it done
- B. Get it right
- C. Get along
- D. Get recognition

22. **Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, "Thank you for providing this information. This will help us complete our investigation promptly."**

- A. Get it done
- B. Get it right
- C. Get along
- D. Get recognition

23. **Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, "Thank you for providing this information. I really appreciate your contributions."**

- A. Get it done
- B. Get it right
- C. Get along
- D. Get recognition

24. **Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, "Thank you for providing this information. The accuracy of our report is extremely important."**

- A. Get it done
- B. Get it right
- C. Get along
- D. Get recognition

25. **Asking directly whether a remark was intended as a put-down upsets the Sniper's routine because...**

- A. it gives him too much recognition.
- B. there is strength in numbers.
- C. he has been planning to take control for a long time.
- D. he expects "more polite" behavior from the victim and bystanders.

26. **What is the impact on the attacking Tank of not moving away, looking the Tank in the eye and interrupting him?**

- A. It makes him run away.
- B. It makes him angrier.
- C. It earns his respect.
- D. It forces him to schedule a meeting with his victim.

27. **Present your ideas to the Know-It-All...**

- A. very indirectly.
- B. after extensive backtracking.
- C. forcefully.
- D. All of the above.
- E. A and B are the best answers.

28. **Which set of actions is most likely to make it safe for the Yes Person to be honest?**

- A. reminding of performance criteria, helping him to plan, reviewing a recent failure
- B. asking about family, helping him to plan, reviewing a recent failure
- C. blending, expressing value in the relationship, affirming positive intent
- D. blending, giving stern looks, reminding of performance criteria

29. **Which of these will probably increase the Maybe Person's comfort level with making a decision?**

- A. Push him to make the decision you know is best.
- B. Remind him that his decision must be perfect, because it will effect a lot of people for a long time.
- C. Help him use a decision making process.
- D. Assure him that his decision will not interfere with your relationship.

30. T F **In getting the Nothing Person to talk, nonverbal communication, specifically the Expectant Look (eyes open wide, eyebrows up, chin up, mouth open slightly, slight forward lean), is not as important as asking open-ended questions.**

31. **When a No Person is in the conversation, what is the value of asking detailed questions to define a problem?**

- A. Asking detailed questions stalls the conversation, giving you time to think of another approach.
- B. Defining the problem reduces negativity in a discussion and leads to better solutions.
- C. It is a strategy for protecting you optimism.
- D. The hard-core No Person often cannot participate much in such analysis, and so you achieve your goal of eliminating his input.

32. **What is the value of getting a Complainer to collect information about the problem he complains about?**

- A. It gives you a break from the Complainer.
- B. It gets the Complainer moving in a problem-solving direction.
- C. It increases the Complainer's sense of powerlessness.
- D. All of the above
- E. Both A and B
- F. Both A and C

33. **When asking a Think-They-Know-It-All for specifics, it is important to speak...**

- A. very quickly.
- B. with an aggressive tone.
- C. as if you are genuinely curious.
- D. using big words and lots of jargon.

34. **How will you know if you have identified aloud the immediate cause of the Grenade's explosion?**

- A. The episode will probably become more violent.
- B. The Grenade will start to shake off the anger.
- C. The Grenade will probably start crying.
- D. The Grenade will feel embarrassed.

35. T F **Your awareness that you can be a difficult person sometimes can help you avoid becoming a difficult person.**

Discussion of Review Questions

1. **What type of difficult person is likely to say “Sure I can do that for you. Whatever needs to be done...!” but then he rarely follows through.**

- A. Complainer
- B. Sniper
- C. Nothing Person
- D. Yes Person

D. is correct. The Yes Person is super-agreeable with whomever he is talking to at the time. As a result he over commits his time and doesn't consistently do what he offers.

Complainers whine about conditions, pointing fingers away from their own responsibility. Snipers attack with put-downs and sarcasm. The Nothing Person is extremely quiet and withdrawn.

2. **What type of difficult person is likely to say, “We could never make it work. I've been doing this a long time, and I can tell you, what you suggest is impossible.”**

- A. Nothing Person
- B. Sniper
- C. No Person
- D. Grenade

C is correct. The No Person consistently says No to any new idea. This might be a longer sentence than a Nothing person is able to get out in one breath. This is not a Sniper's personal attack intended to undermine the victim's confidence or authority. This is not a Grenade's adult-size temper tantrum.

3. **What type of difficult person is likely to tell his baseball team captain “Great job” when he strikes out with bases loaded and the game is now lost.**

- A. Sniper
- B. Tank
- C. Maybe Person
- D. Know-It-All

A is correct. This is a Snipers sarcasm directed at a person's performance. It is not a “frontal attack” of a Tank. It is not an expression of a Maybe Person's indecision. If a Know-It-All sounds sarcastic it is probably arrogance and it is probably in the context of someone's deficiency in knowledge.

4. **“Obviously you haven't learned the intricacies of the operating system. To anyone who has, it is clear that what I'm proposing is the best solution.” What difficult person is likely to say this?**

- A. Yes Person
- B. Tank
- C. Complainer
- D. Know-It-All

D is correct. The Know-It-All is convinced his ideas are the best and quickly dismisses the ideas of anyone else judged not to be as expert as he is. This is not the approval-seeking behavior of a Yes Person. A Tank would probably become more hostile and personal in an attack. A Complainer usually wants nothing to do with new solutions from any source.

5. **You ask him a question. You wait a long time. He shrugs. Which difficult person might you be talking to?**

- A. Nothing Person
- B. Grenade
- C. Think-They-Know-It-All
- D. Maybe Person

A is correct. The Nothing Person tends to be closed-mouthed and unresponsive. This is not an angry outburst of a Grenade. A Think-They-Know-It-All would promptly respond to a question with a look of confidence. The shrug may indicate a Maybe Person's uncertainty, but a Maybe Person probably would not make you wait for that shrug.

6. **“Jones, I've had it up to here with your incompetence! Your reports are not just crap, they are late crap! Get to work! Use some of that brain power people say you have! And get it in on time for a change. I don't care if you have to skip your freaky vegan lunches and stay overnight eight days a week! Get it done! No excuses!” Which difficult person might say this?**

- A. Tank
- B. Grenade
- C. Complainer
- D. Think-They-Know-It-All

A is correct. This is the aggressive, hostile attack of a Tank. The Tank's assaults include personal matters (e.g., the intelligence and the meatless diet of the employee in this example), not just the work performance matters at hand. The Grenade goes even farther off target than the Tank and has really lost his self-control when he explodes. The Complainer is more likely to wallow in the impossibility of a situation that to command changes (“Get it done!”) A Think-They-Know-It-All attempts to impress others by how smart and cool he appears, not by how overpowering he can be.

7. **“Do it over? You want me to do it over? You don't get it, how hard I've worked on that. But then no one gets it! You don't! The big boss doesn't! My wife doesn't! The kids don't! All they care about is getting to their soccer games! Their coaches don't care! And it's getting dark so early now....!” Which difficult person might behave this way?**

- A. Tank
- B. Know-It-All
- C. No Person
- D. Grenade

D is correct. The explosion of this Grenade starts with an immediate problem (“do it over when I've worked so hard?”). But then the angry blast spreads out to other issues far from ground zero (wife, kids, soccer coaches, daylight savings time). This is not the focused attack of a Tank. This is not a Know-It-All's explanation of “the facts,” nor his assertion of own expertise, nor dismissal of someone else's expertise. A No Person does not usually talk this much.

8. **Which difficult person might say this: “Julie has been out so much lately, and I've had to pick up her work. So if I'm behind it's because of that. And the work has become more complicated with the changes we've made lately. I should tell you too that my mom has been kind of sick lately, and that's stressing me out. My computer has been acting buggy lately too.”**

- A. No Person
- B. Complainer
- C. Think-They-Know-It-All
- D. Sniper

B is correct. This Complainer is giving the long list of excuses for being behind in her work. The No Person focuses his negativity on new ideas rather than on the current status. The Think-They-Know-It-All might tell how the work he has completed is of exceptional quality. This is not a Sniper's attack, but a defensive move to justify late work.

9. **“I'm not sure which one might be the best. Why don't you choose?” Which difficult person is likely to say this?**

- A. Think-They-Know-It-All
- B. Nothing Person
- C. Yes Person
- D. Maybe Person

D is correct. This is an indecisive Maybe person. A Think-They-Know-It-All, convincing

himself he has all the best information, would make a decision rather than defer to someone else. A Nothing Person might say he was not sure, but to ask another person to decide would be to overextend himself from his withdrawn position. A Yes Person may not follow through with the decisions he makes, but he can make a decision.

10. **In this conversation, what kind of difficult person might Ted be?**

- TED: Keeping a balance between the gauss and the hyzer is really important.
- KIM: How is it important?
- TED: Oh, you know. It makes a big difference.

- A. Think-They-Know-It-All
- B. Know-It-All
- C. Tank
- D. Maybe Person

A is correct. While a genuine expert knows the details, why something is important, the Think-They-Know-It-All is usually at a loss for such details, and he enjoys using any jargon he has picked up. A Know-It-All would have given Kim a thorough explanation. This is not a Tank's attack. It does not show the indecision of a Maybe Person.

11. **T F When I agree to do something because I value my relationship with the person who asked me, I am operating in a Get Along mode.**

True. This is an example of a non-aggressive people focus.

12. **T F Accountants, pharmacists and engineers will be more successful if they are comfortable working in the Get It Right mode.**

True. Attention to the details of the task at hand is essential for those working in these professions.

13. **T F If completing a project is the most important thing to me, I am working in a Get It Done mode.**

True. Task-oriented pro-action comes when one is acting in a Get It Done mode.

14. **T F My wife had to work on Saturday, and when she got I home showed her all the household chores I had accomplished. I was in a Get Recognized mode.**

True. My hope is that, after seeing the fruit of my labor, she will say “Thank you for working so hard while I was out today.”

15. These are examples of Controlling types of difficult people:

- A. Complainers, Snipers, Tanks
Incorrect. Complainers are Perfectionist types.
B. No People, Yes People, Know-It-Alls
Incorrect. No People are Perfectionists and Yes People are Approval Seeking.
C. Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers
Incorrect. Grenades and Think-They-Know-It-Alls and some Snipers are Attention Getting types.
D. Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Tanks
Correct. Each of these uses a different strategy for asserting control.

16. These are examples of Attention Seeking types of difficult people:

- A. Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers
Correct. Each of these uses a different strategy for claiming the spotlight.
B. Yes People, No People, Maybe People
Incorrect. Yes People and Maybe People are Approval Seeking types, while No People are Perfectionist types.
C. Yes People, No People, Nothing People
Incorrect. Yes People and some Nothing People are Approval Seeking. No People and some Nothing People are Perfectionist types.
D. Complainers, Tanks, Snipers
Incorrect. Complainers are Perfectionists. Tanks are Controlling. Snipers are Controlling or Attention Getting.

17. These are examples of Approval Seeking types of difficult people:

- A. Snipers, Grenades, Think-They-Know-It-Alls
Incorrect. Snipers may be Controlling or Attention Getting.
B. Yes People, Maybe People, Nothing People
Correct. Each of these attempts to be on the good side of everyone at the same time.
C. Complainers, Snipers, Tanks
Incorrect. Complainers are Perfectionists, Tanks are Controlling, Snipers are Controlling or Attention Seeking.
D. Think-They-Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Tanks
Incorrect. Think-They-Know-It-Alls are Attention Getting, Tanks are Controlling, and Snipers may be either of these.

18. These are examples of Perfectionist types of difficult people:

- A. Know-It-Alls, Snipers, Yes People

Incorrect. Know-It-Alls are Controlling, Snipers are Controlling or Attention Seeking, Yes People are Approval Seeking.

B. Nothing People, No People, Complainers

Correct. Each of these holds high standards of how things should be, but low responsibility and initiative for moving things in the direction of their ideals.

C. Tanks, Nothing People, Snipers

Incorrect. Tanks are Controlling, Snipers are Controlling or Attention Seeking, Nothing People are Attention Seeking or Perfectionist types.

D. Complainers, No People, Know-It-Alls

Incorrect. Know-It-Alls are Controlling types.

19. Which of these behaviors might be performed as an act of blending?

- A. Ordering lobster at a restaurant
B. Smiling
C. Gesturing
D. Speaking more rapidly
E. All of the above

Correct, including A. Yes, someone might watch his companions order first at a restaurant and then decide to order the same dish, a similarly priced dish, etc. Blending demonstrates common ground.

20. In this exchange, which listening skill does Jill demonstrate?

NED: I'm fed up with the same old treatment I'm getting every day. I think it's time for me to start looking elsewhere.
JILL: Fed up.

- A. Looking at the other
B. Blending
C. Backtracking
D. Asking for more

C is correct. We can't tell if Jill is looking at Ned or not, or if she is adjusting her speech, movements or other behavior to blend with Ned. She is not asking for more information. Jill is repeating some words that Ned has already said—backtracking.

21. Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, "Thank you for providing this information. The more we can exchange information like this, the better our relationships will be over the long run."

- A. Get it done
B. Get it right
C. Get along
D. Get recognition

C is correct. The key word is "relationship." People who prioritize the Get Along intent are most interested in maintaining good relationships with others.

22. Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, "Thank you for providing this information. This will help us complete our investigation promptly."

- A. Get it done
B. Get it right
C. Get along
D. Get recognition

A is correct. "Completing the investigation promptly" appeals to those who are task-oriented.

23. Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, "Thank you for providing this information. I really appreciate your contributions."

- A. Get it done
B. Get it right
C. Get along
D. Get recognition

D is correct. The speaker specifically recognizes the other with "I really appreciate your contributions."

24. Which intent would you be addressing if you told someone, "Thank you for providing this information. The accuracy of our report is extremely important."

- A. Get it done
B. Get it right
C. Get along
D. Get recognition

B is correct. The one working in the Get it Right intent is concerned above all with accuracy.

25. Asking directly whether a remark was intended as a put-down upsets the Sniper's routine because...

- A. it gives him too much recognition.

Incorrect. While some Snipers are Attention-Seekers, such direct questioning causes them to lose face rather than giving him too much recognition.

- B. there is strength in numbers.

Incorrect. True statement, but not relevant to the victim's posing a direct question to the Sniper.
C. he has been planning to take control for a long time.

Incorrect. It may be that the Sniper has been disgruntled with others for a long time, but this does not explain why posing the direct question is effective.

D. he expects "more polite" behavior from the victim and bystanders.

Correct. The Sniper is safe only when hidden in a blind made of conventions of politeness and social commitments. Unconventional directness exposes the Sniper.

26. What is the impact on the attacking tank of not moving away, looking the Tank in the eye and interrupting him?

- A. It makes him run away.

Incorrect. If you face a real Tank, you cannot make him run away.

- B. It makes him angrier.

Incorrect. Showing signs of weakness, not strength, will usually increase the intensity of the Tank's attack.

- C. It earns his respect.

Correct. For the Tank, such behavior is part of normal give-and-take. You are respected for not cowering.
D. It forces him to schedule a meeting with his victim.

Incorrect. You may eventually agree to meet with the Tank at another place and time. But that is not the direct impact holding your ground, making eye contact and interrupting.

27. Present your ideas to the Know-It-All...

- A. very indirectly.
B. after extensive backtracking.
C. forcefully.
D. All of the above.
E. A and B are the best answers.

E is correct. Presenting an idea forcefully to the Know-It-All will be perceived as a challenge to his expertise.

28. Which set of actions is most likely to make it safe for the Yes Person to be honest?

- A. reminding of performance criteria, helping him to plan, reviewing a recent failure
B. asking about family, helping him to plan, reviewing a recent failure
C. blending, expressing value in the relationship, affirming positive intent

Incorrect. In conversations with a Yes Person you might do all of this at some point, but these are not actions that help the Yes Person feel safe to speak honestly.

Correct. In conversations with a Yes Person you might do all of this at some point, but these are not actions that help the Yes Person feel safe to speak honestly.

Correct. These all increase the comfort level of the relationship-oriented Yes Person.

D. blending, giving stern looks, reminding of performance criteria

Incorrect. Stern looks will put the Yes Person on edge, as will starting off the conversation with a discussion of performance criteria.

29. Which of these will probably increase the Maybe Person's comfort level with making a decision?

A. Push him to make the decision you know is best.

Incorrect. The Maybe Person's problem is that he is so easily influenced by others; it wouldn't be much of a push. Your problem with this approach is that someone else may come along and push him to a different decision.

B. Remind him that his decision must be perfect, because it will effect a lot of people for a long time.

Incorrect. This is what the Maybe Person fears about any decision, and reminding him of this will raise his anxiety level.

C. Help him use a decision making process.

Incorrect. Do this *after* increasing his comfort level with making a decision.

D. Assure him that his decision will not interfere with your relationship.

Correct. The Maybe person puts off decisions because he fears his decision will make others dislike him.

30. T F In getting the Nothing Person to talk, nonverbal communication, specifically the Expectant Look (eyes open wide, eyebrows up, chin up, mouth open slightly, slight forward lean), is not as important as asking open-ended questions.

False. Often, your non-verbal communication will be at least as important as the words you say to get the Nothing Person to talk.

31. When a No Person is in the conversation, what is the value of asking detailed questions to define a problem?

A. Asking detailed questions stalls the conversation, giving you time to think of another approach.

Incorrect. Your intent is not to stall, and rather than trying to think of another approach, you should be listening attentively to the conversation.

B. Defining the problem reduces negativity in a discussion and leads to better solutions.

Correct. It reduces negativity because the No Person cannot simply pronounce, "It won't work"

during a problem definition discussion. Problem definition can lead to better solutions, just as a doctor collects information through lab work before prescribing treatment.

C. It is a strategy for protecting you optimism.

Incorrect. Though a problem-solving approach to life will help guard against pessimism, asking detailed questions to define a problem was not identified as a strategy for protecting your optimism.

D. The hard-core No Person often cannot participate much in such analysis, and so you achieve your goal of eliminating his input.

Incorrect. It is true that the No Person's habit is to deny possibility rather than analyze. While you want to reduce the amount of negativity the No Person radiates, your goal is not to exclude his ideas—just the negativity.

32. What is the value of getting a complainer to collect information about the problem he complains about?

A. It gives you a break from the Complainer.

Incorrect. This is true, but not the best answer.

B. It gets the Complainer moving in a problem-solving direction.

Incorrect. This is true, but not the best answer.

C. It increases the Complainer's sense of powerlessness.

Incorrect. On the contrary, taking an action that can contribute to solving a problem can reduce a Complainer's sense of powerlessness and futility.

D. All of the above

Incorrect. C is not true.

E. Both A and B

Correct. This is the best answer.

F. Both A and C

Incorrect. C is not true.

33. When asking a Think-They-Know-It-All for specifics, it is important to speak...

A. very quickly.

Incorrect. Speaking very quickly is valuable as a blending technique if your Think-They-Know-It-All speaks very quickly. But not all fast talkers are fast talkers.

B. with an aggressive tone.

Incorrect. This can threaten the Think-They-Know-It-All and in the end serve to increase the negative behaviors of seeking attention.

C. as if you are genuinely curious.

Correct. This encourages him to respond to your questions. His responses will then help you know if he is a genuine expert or a fake.

D. using big words and lots of jargon.

Incorrect. Though the Think-They-Know-It-All may use lots of jargon, you need not.

34. How will you know if you have identified aloud the immediate cause of the Grenade's explosion?

A. The episode will probably become more violent.

Incorrect. The opposite is likely.

B. The Grenade will start to shake off the anger.

Correct. Watch for shaking of the body or blinking of the eyes.

C. The Grenade will probably start crying.

Incorrect. This may happen at some point, but usually not at the point when you put your finger

on the cause. Identifying the cause makes the Grenade feel listened to; her receives attention.

D. The Grenade will feel embarrassed.

Incorrect. Grenades often feel embarrassed after the episode is completely over.

35. T F Your awareness that you can be a difficult person sometimes can help you avoid becoming a difficult person.

True. Such humility can lead you to reflection on how you relate with others and get things done. Your awareness can help you put the brakes on behavioral patterns that are moving into the gray zone and beyond.

Prepare to Meet Your Coach

Student Name: _____

Bring these items completed when you meet with your instructor or coach.

Reflective Writing: What idea or activity in this module has been the most helpful to you? Why?

What questions do you still have?

Instructor

Record student performance in right column of the table.

Item	%age of Module	Standard	Student Performance
Quiz	100	28 of 35 correct	
Total:			

Date Module Completed: _____

Notes:

Next Assignment & Due Date: _____