

## Dealing with Difficult People



California State  
**PTA**<sup>®</sup>  
*everychild.one voice.*

California State PTA Convention 2013

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## Agenda

- Recognizing difficult people
- Managing difficult people
- Handling/resolving the difficulty

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## Leadership Styles

- The Driver
- The Expressive
- The Amiable
- The Analytical



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## Recognizing Difficult Behaviors



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## Reasons People Behave This Way

- Communication problems
- Personality differences
- Fear and Insecurity
- Life experiences
- Cultural or Educational diversity
- "We've always done it that way"

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## Behaviors That Enflame

- Yelling and blaming
- Acting defensively
- Personal insults
- Ultimatums
- Ignoring

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

- Accommodating
- Avoiding
- Competing
- Compromise
- Collaborating



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## Managing Difficult People

- Acknowledge difficulty
- Try to isolate the cause
- Look and LISTEN
- Be objective
- Remain neutral



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## Tools

Competing Goals



Personality Differences

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**Tools**

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Power Struggles



Different Perspectives



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**Tools**

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Life Experiences

Cultural Differences

“Weva”

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**Tools**

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Lack of knowledge of PTA policies and procedures

Communication

- Content communication
- Positive communication

Unmet needs

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## CONCLUSION

Recognition of behavior  
 Reasons for difficult behavior  
 Behaviors that enflame difficult behavior  
 Management and tools

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## GOT QUESTIONS?



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15

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## Dealing with difficult people

Occasionally we find ourselves in a difficult situation, needing to handle opposing viewpoints or direct competition between people. The first things to remember are:

### **Do Not:**

- 4 Interrupt
- 4 Blame
- 4 Think of what we are going to say while the other is talking
- 4 Change the subject
- 4 Minimize the situation
- 4 Ignore
- 4 Jump to conclusions

### **Common problems can often be avoided if PTA leaders take the following steps:**

- Be knowledgeable about PTA, its purposes, programs, legislative policies and the organization.
- Be familiar with bylaws and refer to them when conducting PTA business. Have copies distributed to all board members and available to any member who wants a copy. Bylaws are a protection and assure the democratic process.
- Follow all PTA policies and procedures.
- Be informed about the issues.
- Respect the rights of members. Allow ample time in meetings for discussion of issues. Encourage speaking and voting.
- Focus on issues, not people or personalities. Leaders must develop skills to work with all types of people. Respect the opinions of others.
- Cooperate and communicate with each other and the principal.

### **In problem solving and conflict resolution, focus on the following:**

#### **• Issues and Facts -**

Understand the main issues and facts from the other person's perspective.

- **Perceptions -**

As people express their viewpoints or their perceptions, it is important to realize that their perceptions *are their reality*. Allow people to identify and express their perceptions of the events surrounding the conflict situation.

- **Values -**

Peoples' reactions, sensitivities and tolerances are often heavily dependent on their values. The listener should ask questions and listen for information that defines key values and identifies the aspects of the conflict that are most significant.

- **Assumptions and Suspensions -**

Identify the basic assumptions. Determine what the other person assumes to be true and valid. Discover what suspicions people may have about why a specific situation is occurring, or perhaps why a person is behaving in a particular way.

- **Feelings -**

It is valuable to identify feelings, not simply to provide for venting, but to ensure an opportunity to acknowledge the specific feelings that have prevented the conflict from being resolved.

- **Intentions -**

Many people in conflict feel terribly misunderstood. Misunderstanding intentions is often a major contributor to conflict escalation. The listener must ask questions and provide opportunities that allow parties to present and clarify their intentions.

- **Needs -**

In many instances, as people present their issues, they are describing their needs. Appropriate questions will allow the parties to identify their needs.

## **Use language to encourage compromise:**

- Move away from the "I'm right, you're wrong" wording.

Due to their moral connotation, "right/wrong" discussions tend to escalate, deepening the conflict, thus making it harder for either side to soften positions and compromise.

- Help the situation by talking about "what works" and "what doesn't work" instead.

"This doesn't work for me." "This doesn't work in our PTA." This type of "what works" language is neutral and free of any moral undertones.

**The goal is finding appropriate options,  
alternate solutions, and good choices that "work for all of us".**

# DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

## DO'S AND DON'TS

Handling difficult people is often a process. Parties must be engaged in and drive the process. You may need to start over if no progress, but do not rehash—always move forward.

<b>DO:</b>	<b>DON'T:</b>
Be committed to process	Show bias through body language
Set ground rules	Give unwanted advice/suggestions
Be neutral	Criticize parties
Be patient	Diagnose the problem
Listen objectively	Reassure—negates neutrality
Actively listen- restate what you hear	Interrogate—let parties tell story
Follow six (6) steps to resolve conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parties tell you the situation</li> <li>• Brainstorm solutions</li> <li>• Parties agree to 3-5 best solutions</li> <li>• Parties develop action plan/ timeline</li> <li>• Parties carry out action plan immediately</li> <li>• Choose criteria for assessing success of plan (together with parties)</li> </ul>	Be insensitive to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different PTA knowledge levels</li> <li>• Cultural differences</li> <li>• Parties' lack of trust</li> <li>• Differing values—why in PTA</li> <li>• Hidden reasons for conflict</li> </ul>
Put aside your opinions/ assumptions	Become part of “us vs. them”



# How to handle difficult people

**Difficult people come in all shapes and sizes but can easily be identified by their reactive nature.** The following definitions are from psychologist Robert M. Bramson's *Coping with Difficult People*.

**Hostile-aggressives** These are bullies who use verbal aggression. Varieties include the **Sherman Tank** who rolls over people to make a point, the **Sniper** who uses calculated digs and unfunny teasing, and the **Exploder** who uses uncontrolled outbursts (temper tantrums) to get his or her way, or at least, to communicate unhappiness with a situation.

**Complainers** They constantly complain but don't do anything to solve the problem, claiming, "It's not my responsibility/fault."

**Clams** They're silent and unresponsive or use short replies like "yes," "no" and "if you say so."

**Super-agreeables** They agree with everyone about everything just to be liked. They're not so dependable when the going gets tough.

**Negativists** They have a limited vocabulary: "We tried that before and it didn't work."

**Know-it-alls** They know more than you do and want you to acknowledge it. Two varieties include the **Bulldozer**, a genuine expert who doesn't like to see his or her plan thwarted; and **Balloons**, bogus experts who may know something about the matter in question but won't listen to others about anything.

**Indecisives** They won't make a decision unless they feel 100 percent right (a rarity for anyone). They prefer to wait for the decision to be made for them, or for the situation to disappear.

**There are ways to deal with difficult people. Following these basic principles will help in these situations:**

When confronted by one who is responding emotionally (and calling it logic), ask for time to stop and think. This pause gives you time to think and often has a calming effect on the screaming offender.

Listen to your heart. If your heart rate is up, you risk replacing your cool logic with a heated rejoinder.

Hold your immediate response. Your first impulse is to answer the person in kind. Don't do it. Consider your strategy. Let him or her jump to conclusions as you keep control of yourself.

Ask yourself, "What do I want to happen?" Base your actions on your goal.

When people are yelling, don't do anything until you get them to stop. If they won't stop yelling because you asked them to, ask them if they will run that by you, "a bit more slowly this time." Have you ever tried to yell slowly?

Remember that explaining your point of view will not help. First find out what the other person wants. Then work from there to find a suitable alternative.

Let the other person know you hear what is being said. Restate the problem. This will clarify the problem for both of you and let the person know you think he or she is worth listening to.

Ask, "What would you like me to do?" Listen to the answer and state it back to make sure you got it right.

State what you want. Come to an agreement.

Get verbal acknowledgment of what you both have agreed to do. Make sure you both know what's expected.

Let the other person have the last word, if possible. A parting shot will undo all that's been accomplished. Having the last word is an aggressive act.

*Adapted from a National PTA Multi-State Conference*

*Sources: Problem Bosses: Who They Are and How to Deal with Them, Mardy Grothe (Facts on File Publishing, 1986); Coping with Difficult People, Robert M. Bramson (Anchor Press/Doubleday 1981); Dinosaur Brains, Albert Bernstein and Sidney Craft Rozen; "Working with Jerks," Training Magazine (Maya 1987).*

# Styles of Handling Conflict

## **Accommodating (*I'd rather switch than fight*):**

I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for the wishes of other people,  
I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.  
I try not to hurt the other's feelings and try to stress those things upon which we agree.  
If the other's position seems very important to her, I would try to meet her wishes.  
I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.

## **Avoiding (*I'll get right back to you...on the 12th of never!*):**

There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.  
I try to avoid unpleasantness for myself.  
I try to postpone dealing with an issue until I have had some time to think it over.  
I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.  
I try to do what is necessary to avoid tensions.  
I sometimes avoid taking positions that would create controversy.

## **Competing (*What's mine is mine; what's yours is mine!*):**

I assert my wishes and I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.  
I make an effort to get my way and try to win my position.  
I press to get my points made.  
I try to show the logic and benefits of my position.  
I work to convince the other person of the merits of my position.

## **Compromising (*You've got to give some to get some!*):**

I try to find a compromise solution and get the other to settle for it.  
I will let the other person have some of his/her positions if she/she lets me have some of mine.  
I attempt to find a fair combination of gains and losses for both of us.  
I try to find a position that is intermediate between his/hers and mine.  
I propose a middle ground.

## **Collaborating (*Together we can solve this problem!*):**

I always share the problem with the other person so that we can work it out.  
I try to deal with all of his/her and my concerns.  
I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.  
I always lean toward a direct discussion of the problem.  
I am very often concerned with satisfying all our wishes.  
I usually seek the other's help in working out a solution.

# Creating a Positive Leadership Climate

Good leaders work hard at creating a climate and culture in which their team can thrive. You have done this if:

- ▶ your board has confidence in each others' knowledge and abilities
- ▶ board members believe they can count on each other...and do
- ▶ members hold one another to high performance standards
- ▶ members listen to each others' ideas and opinions courteously
- ▶ members make a point to publicly recognize and appreciate other members' significant contributions
- ▶ members are comfortable admitting failures
- ▶ individual board members are open to ideas and suggestions from other members at every level for ways to improve
- ▶ your team members honor agreements and commitments made to each other in matters large and small
- ▶ members provide each other—and you—with honest feedback knowing they will suffer no recriminations.

When your board acts as if their own success is linked to the organization's success, you'll see high levels of positive concern, interest and involvement throughout the entire organization. This progress is also an outstanding sign of successful leadership.

# Teamwork Essentials

Teamwork is so important in achieving the mission of PTA. All of the board members need to work together. Being the leader sometimes means surrendering your own wishes and letting the group decide.

- ❖ Always remember whatever authority you have comes from the position not the person. You are the temporary holder of your position of responsibility.
- ❖ Remember there is not any single best way to do something.
- ❖ Surround yourself with people who are knowledgeable about your organization; the more everyone knows, the better your organization will function and it is also less likely that big mistakes will happen
- ❖ Listen, listen and listen again. Make it easy for people to talk to you.
- ❖ Delegate, delegate and delegate. Effective delegation saves time, energy and your sanity and increases the diversity in approaches. Many need to be asked to join a project.
- ❖ Let others assume responsibility, sooner rather than later.
- ❖ Empower your team by letting them do their job their way. Give them the ball and let them run with it. Trust them to do the job.
- ❖ Give credit for accomplishments. No one should doubt they are appreciated.
- ❖ Expect competence, but be ready to provide support if needed.
- ❖ Remain flexible in your leadership style, no one style works with everyone.
- ❖ Respect each other.