



## I Work with Difficult People

We all have deep feelings about how we are treated by others. Success in the workplace depends heavily on how people relate to each other. Studies show that 60-80% of the difficulties experienced in organizations arise from strained, under-productive relationships between employees. As a result of these challenging work relationships, the organization may experience lower productivity and employees are at risk of burnout, anxiety, depression or even physical illness.

Harmonious relationships and effective communication are essential to success and satisfaction in the workplace. To achieve this, we must first keep in mind that we cannot change other people. We only have the power to change ourselves! We are all guilty of negative tendencies from time to time and we may well have resorted to using negative strategies when attempting to deal with difficult people. We can find ourselves engaging in the same behaviors we detest in others. We can find ourselves being the manipulator, the whiner or the attacker.

**Manipulation** is a stance that attempts to influence another's behavior through secrecy or deception. Ultimately, manipulators lose the trust of coworkers and damage their own reputations.

**Whiners** complain without making any attempt to improve the problem. They are playing the role of victim and run the risk of losing the respect of others and may end up under attack themselves.

**Attacking** is the repeated expression of anger and frustration by engaging in criticism, blame or condescension to gain the compliance of others. Attackers fail to earn the goodwill and cooperation of others and undermine their own position.

Each of these practices can be remedied by replacing them with three principles of effective communication:

- ◆ **Be Authentic** – Take time to be honest rather than manipulative. When we openly acknowledge reality and share our personal point of view, we foster trust and connection with others.
- ◆ **Take Responsibility** – By taking ownership of our own actions and reactions, we leave behind the powerlessness of the victim's role. By expressing our own needs and communicating directly with others, we forge healthier, more productive relationships.
- ◆ **Extend Respect** – It is essential that we treat others with understanding and patience rather than resorting to personal attacks. Respect honors the differences among people. Both listening well and allowing others to solve their own problems are key to demonstrating respect. If we give up the illusion of always being right and in control, we are able to cooperate instead of attack.

*“Example is not the main thing in influencing others.  
It is the only thing.” ~ Albert Schweitzer*