

# Dealing with Difficult Coworkers

*Difficult coworkers exist in every workplace. Do you know how to handle them?*

## Who Are Difficult Colleagues?

The actions and personality traits of difficult people make it hard to work with them. They come in many types.

- The chatterbox never stops talking and prevents work from getting done. Chatterboxes include those who gossip and share “too much information.”
- The criticizer/complainer is a negative person who never says anything good about anyone. The complaints go on and on!
- The illusionist promises the world, but later doesn’t follow through and fails to meet commitments.
- The glory hog wants power, credit, and the spotlight, whether deserved or not.
- The delegator never completes his or her fair share of the work and always has an excuse such as “I’m sick.” or “I have to pick up my kids.”

## Interrupting the Pattern

The key to intervention is to interrupt the difficult coworker’s pattern early in your relationship or it will only get worse. If you don’t, you could be blamed later when conflict with the difficult person becomes a pattern others notice—such as your boss.

## Ineffective Coping Strategies

Anger, yelling, constant conflict, ridicule, violence, dirty tricks, and trying to get someone fired can get you labeled as “the problem.” You

need support, effective ideas, and self-awareness. Start with self-awareness.

## Are You a Difficult Coworker?

Do you overreact? Are you too sensitive? Are you too intolerant of others? Here’s an assessment quiz:

- Do you chatter, talk on the phone, or complain incessantly?
- Do you gossip and broadcast your personal problems?
- Do you take credit for others’ work? Hog the spotlight?
- Do you come to work sick?
- Do you discuss religion or politics?
- Do you arrive late and leave early? Leave dirty dishes in the staff kitchen sink? Leave office messes for others to clean?
- Do you criticize, brag, reveal confidential information, or violate the personal boundaries of others?

If you do these things, you’re a difficult coworker!

## Effective Strategies

If you have a problem with a coworker, discuss it with someone you trust. Together, brainstorm solutions.

Document the problem. After each incident, list the date, time, what happened, who was, actions you took, and the names of any witnesses. Keep the document locked up.

**Have a private discussion** with your difficult colleague. Use “I” statements that express how your coworker’s actions affect you. For

example, to the chatterbox, say, “I love talking to you, but I’m not getting my work done. Let’s have lunch tomorrow and talk.” Don’t attack. Instead, start by making the difficult person more aware. Try to reach an agreement about future actions. Sometimes, gentle humor can help. This can be tricky though; you don’t want others to see you as unkind.

**Critical point!** When you observe the difficult coworker acting positively, comment in a way that will encourage future positive actions. With the complainer, change the subject when the complaining starts!

**Sometimes, a group** can approach the boss to discuss a problem. An employee assistance counselor at **Quantum EAP** can also help, and your meeting will be kept confidential. If you have a glory hog, make sure your boss knows about the contributions you made to each project. Try putting your contributions in writing and sending a note to the boss.

## The Last Resort

If these actions fail, avoiding the difficult coworker might be the best choice. □ That could include transferring to another department within your organization.

Be careful. In every workplace, you will encounter difficult people. Learning how to cope with them is the preferred approach, unless the behavior constitutes to an offensive, intimidating, or hostile work environment. That’s the definition of harassment, and it’s illegal.



Call Quantum EAP at  
1-877-747-1200.