



## How to Work with Difficult Co-Workers

Emily L. Breckenridge, Career Development Specialist

They exist in every office throughout the world. They make each day at work a little more taxing. They can even make you feel bad about yourself or your work. Whether your difficult co-worker is a “Debbie Downer,” a “Credit Stealer,” or a “Kiss Up,” working with these people, let alone dealing with them can make you miserable. These pointers, however, can make your work day a little easier by helping you learn to work with a difficult co-worker.

1) **Take a break:** When you spend most of your day inside the four walls of your office or cubicle, you are certain to be irritated by something. Taking a minute for yourself, and going outside to get some fresh air or a cup of coffee, can help relax you, and reduce the irritation factor.

2) **Change your viewpoint:** Instead of concentrating on what annoys you about your co-worker, try to focus on his/her positive traits. Make a positive comment to him/her about one of those traits. Chances are you can probably learn something from the co-worker, so it is best to keep your relationship with him/her strong.

3) **Take action:** If a co-worker’s behavior has bothered you for a while, don’t continue to let it fester. First, take a moment to consider if it is truly your co-workers actions that are bothering you. Could the problem be with you? If you have several co-workers with whom you have a difficult time working, is the common thread among all of them you? If so, maybe it’s time to examine your own habits and work behaviors, and determine if perhaps changing yourself could be the key to having a better relationship with your co-workers. If you’ve examined your role in the situation, and find that the issue is not because of something you are doing, confront the problem by discussing it with the co-worker, but make sure that the conversation doesn’t become a personal attack. Carly Drum, workplace etiquette expert with search firm, Drum Associates, explains that “co-workers sometimes don’t notice they are doing something really annoying because it’s just by habit. By saying, ‘I don’t know if you noticed, but ... (insert issue here)’ a reasonable co-worker will usually be receptive to your feelings” (Zupek, Rachel. ”Dealing with Difficult Co-Workers,” CareerBuilder.com).

4) **Be professional:** We all have habits that sometimes get on people’s nerves. Just as you wouldn’t want your habits discussed among your co-workers, the co-worker that you take issue with doesn’t want his/her behavior as water-cooler-talk either. Avoid complaining to other co-workers about your co-worker’s behavior. Gossiping only makes you look unprofessional, and can make the situation worse. Also, respect your co-worker’s privacy by keeping all of the conversations you

have with him/her about the situation private. Confrontation in front of other co-workers or supervisors is unnecessary and disrespectful.

5) **Talk to your supervisor:** If you've done everything you can, but the co-worker's behavior is still too much for you to handle, or if the problem is more than just behavioral, take it to your supervisor. Managers are trained to handle these situations, and most are committed to keeping the work environment healthy.