

Difficult People and the Challenge of Inter-personal Relations (They are out there!)

Michael F. Shaughnessy^{1*}, Linda M. Denton²

¹Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, New Mexico

²State University of New York at Albany.

*Corresponding Author

Michael F. Shaughnessy

Eastern New Mexico University,
Portales, New Mexico.

Article History

Received: 11.09.2024

Accepted: 23.10.2024

Published: 25.11.2024

Abstract: Interpersonal relations have always been challenging, but in this Post Covid era, increasingly so. This paper will offer glimpses into some individuals and the increasing complexity of the issues we may face dealing with difficult situations in the interpersonal realm.

Keywords: Interpersonal Relations; Rapport; Relationships.

Cite this article:

Shaughnessy, M. F. Denton, L. M., (2024). Difficult People and the Challenge of Inter-personal Relations (They are out there!). *ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(11), 125-126.

Introduction

In general, we all have to deal with people- in some manner, fashion or form. We may interact with fast-food servers, process servers, doctors and dentists. Some individuals are cordial, congenial and courteous and others harsh, vitriolic, acerbic and challenging to deal with in relationships. This paper will describe a few of them and attempt to offer some ideas as to how to cope with these difficult personalities.

A quick statement from an individual encapsulates the issue:

“Oh yes! The contrarians!! I know them well!! The fun factor is understanding how to torture them at their own game!!”

For some individuals life is a game. Not a game of chance but a game to see how much grief, aggravation and exasperation they can provide to others in their environment. They may consciously or unconsciously ‘decide’ to wreak havoc and chaos at their place of employment, regardless of the position they hold. They are often gentle, demure and engaging initially but after they have been established in their position, their true nature comes out. They are vampires in disguise and they suck the emotional energy out of all they come in contact with.

The ‘having of an opinion’.

It is worth noticing that it may be challenging to share one's opinion with these individuals as they aren't capable of appreciating that another person can have an opinion different than their own that is also VALID.

The phrase “my way or the highway” comes to mind almost immediately.

They are difficult to be around and best avoided, right?

A significant issue is that we cannot typically avoid our co-workers. We are ‘required’ to work with them in teams, meetings and committees.

They may see things from a negative/pessimistic point of view or a positive/optimistic one, however the key element is that they cannot be swayed from their own perspective or sometimes even consider another point of view.

The intriguing part of working with these types is ‘noticing’ the way they process information and interact with the world.

We can observe them from afar and witness the ways they interact or fail to interact with others.

People see things from different points of view; this is a given. Some see things in the short term, some in the long term. Some see immediate ramifications and repercussions, and some see no consequences at all. This is especially true for their behaviors and interactions. They seem to be completely unaware of the distress they create or perhaps gloat over it.

People show who they really ARE by how they drive. For example, when you put your blinker on to change lanes, do they speed up to block you OR do they hang back and allow you access in a cordial congenial matter and let you into their lane?

In many places, the behavior is 90% blocking access to the lane. There is a 'special name' for these people that we may enjoy saying aloud when this happens!

Every day, there are other humans who want to take our lives on the freeway because wherever they are going is MORE important than our continued existence on this planet. Am I right?

Psychologists, counselors and mental health workers have studied humans their entire lives but often only observationally or in a therapeutic and comfortable environment. They have not had to work with them, be teammates or serve on a project committee with them.

Some people just suck the life out of others. They are emotionally draining, exasperating and frustrating.

These have been labeled "vampires" for lack of a better word.

On the other hand, there are others who are positive, uplifting and nurturing and create an energy that emanates outward and provides nurturance within one's soul that should be celebrated. It is amazing to reconcile the fact that we can encounter two such disparate individuals in one place on this great planet of ours!

Some people are quite introverted and don't have much patience for those who deplete the oxygen in the room and drain it of all pleasantness. If it is a work scenario, some individuals with better coping skills are able to manage it by entertaining themselves since they understand the vampire's 'need' to always be right or dominant.

Many of us have a high need to 'do the right thing' vs. 'having to be right'. In the world of work, there are many who MUST be right, and we may let them be so by guiding them to how others see things that allows them to feel they 'won'. It's downright exhilarating although, yes, at times VERY energy depleting!

Ahhhh...human are so messy and entertaining all at once...and often the interaction with these individuals can cause one to reflect on their own inadequacies or shortcomings (me included!)

In a sense we are all damaged goods and doing the best we can...with whatever skills we have.

The concept of individuals being "damaged" is an important one. We never know what kind of trauma they have been through as a child or the difficulties they faced as an adolescent. We never know what they may have faced in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq or Iran or wherever, serving their country. Some we can infer have PTSD- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Others are in therapy and

others need to be in therapy. Getting them to recognize their need for therapy is another issue.

Holland (2018) has described these individuals quite clearly:

They don't take accountability

They are always involved in some kind of drama

They always one up you.

They diminish your problems and play up their own.

They act like a martyr.

They use your good nature against you.

They use guilt trips or ultimatums.

They are co-dependent.

They criticize or bully.

They intimidate.

Some suggestions from Holland (2018)

Establish boundaries

Adjust your expectations

Don't give them an inch.

Guard your emotional capacity

Cut them out entirely.

Shaughnessy (nd) has also published on combatting these energy vampires in the past.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has attempted to superficially examine the realm of human relationships and discuss the challenges of working with and coping with the difficult individuals that we occasionally encounter. Coping skills and interpersonal skills are obviously needed in this realm.

References

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