



## Making Your Point: Helping Students Deal with "Difficult People" In the Workplace Reprinted from RAISE E-News, Vol. 3, No. 2, April 2017

Sometimes, helping students LAND the job is only part of the challenge; helping them LOVE the job, especially when they work with a coworker who is difficult, can be another challenge altogether.

"Difficult people" come in all shapes and sizes, but the problems they create in the workplace have two things in common: first, the situation rarely gets better on its own, and second, a screaming match or tears will not make it any better.

If you are working with a student who is

facing this challenge, you might offer these tips:

1. **Look at yourself first** - That's right. Ask yourself, "Is this person REALLY the problem, or am I overreacting?" "Is this a pattern for me?" "Have I experienced difficulty with the same type of person or actions?" "Is this person *pushing my buttons*?"
2. **Talk to someone you trust - Brainstorm your feelings.** When you feel like you are the object of an attack, it

is often difficult to objectively assess your options. Anger, pain, humiliation, fear, and concern about making the situation worse are legitimate emotions.

3. **Don't whine** - No one wants a reputation for being a whiner or a troublemaker. If you talk to coworkers and ask for advice, be ready to take action. The goal in talking to others is not to complain, it is to generate ideas.

4. **Practice before you talk to your coworker** - If you plan to talk to your offending coworker, decide what you plan to say. Keep your focus on the person's behavior, not the person. For example, you might say: "When you take credit for work we do together, it is unfair to me," instead of, "You are a liar."

5. **Keep things private** - Do not confront the person in front of others. Keep the conversation private unless/until you need to involve your boss.

6. **Take some notes** - Sometimes interpersonal problems can affect your productivity, and your progress. If this happens, make some notes about the

situation - when and where it happened, what happened, and how your coworker's behavior affects the bottom line.

7. **Go up the ladder** - If talking to your coworker did not improve the situation, make a plan to address the issue. Perhaps involve your coworker's boss. A good boss is likely to bring your difficult coworker and his supervisor into a three or four-way discussion at this point. Expect to participate in follow-up discussions over time.

8. **Stay Safe** - Sometimes, workplace conflicts feel unsafe. If you are asked to do something that is dangerous, or are at risk of physical or emotional injury, get help right away.



**Changing Lives Every Day.**