

Surviving The Storm: How To Deal with A Narcissist at Work

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It would be nice if we could say that narcissistic coworkers were a rare breed, few and far between, but unfortunately dealing with a narcissist at work is something that may have had to come to terms with. Learning how to deal with a narcissist at work takes considerable time and energy, but if it allows you to maintain your peace at work and get your tasks done without interference or interruption, it seems worth investing the energy to figure it out. It might also help to understand these narcissistic coworkers in the workplace rather than just resorting to pushing them away every chance you get.



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HOW TO DEAL WITH A NARCISSIST AT WORK: NARCISSIST COWORKER SIGNS

We might be using the term “narcissist” loosely here—not every person we might have encountered at work necessarily satisfies the clinical requirements of a personality disorder, but for lack of a better word, we’re working with what we’ve got. A narcissistic coworker is often one who prioritizes themselves over anything else, choosing to focus on their own interests over everything else. Such narcissistic coworkers are usually easy to spot within the workplace but it might be useful to be able to look out for some signs of a narcissistic coworker. While we don’t recommend using these to hand out a diagnosis to the people around you, it might be helpful to be cognizant of these signs.

- They spend a disproportionate amount of time talking about themselves often adding up details or changing the story
- They dominate the conversation and like to be at the center of it
- They attribute most successes to themselves even if they weren't necessarily involved in the project
- They don't take ownership of mistakes and prefer to shift the blame
- They are rarely empathetic or show concern
- They dismiss your thoughts and opinions in favor of their own
- They believe that they are superior to those around them, and become overly critical of others
- They believe they are more deserving of an opportunity even if inexperienced in the field
- They make changes to projects and make unilateral decisions often

HOW TO HANDLE A NARCISSIST AT WORK

If the signs are there and you've determined that your coworker frequently displays these traits, you can then move on to deciding how to deal with a narcissist at work. There are a few strategies that you can try out depending on what extent this affects you and how closely you have to work with the said coworker.

IGNORE THEM

The easiest solution for dealing with narcissists at work is often to just ignore their behavior and focus on the task lined up in front of you. You might find it useful to remind yourself that they are clearly behaving problematically in ways that are not your fault, making it easier to distance yourself from how their behavior makes you feel. If it's a narcissistic coworker you only deal with on occasion, then you might have some more room to prepare yourself for every interaction. You might be able to determine an agenda for your conversation and go in with a game plan, clearing your head before you initiate any conversation with them.

Even if you do have to interact with them regularly, you could choose to cut down on any social time with them and restrict your conversations to work. This will not be taken lightly, however, so you might need to prepare yourself for the consequences as well.

MAINTAIN YOUR COOL

Once you realize that the coworker is not going to change his ways and there isn't too much you can do about it, you might have to work on maintaining your own peace as the best way to handle a narcissist at work. Try to get your own work in order and calm yourself down before you approach them. If these narcissistic coworkers see that they are able to rattle you when you fight back or make snide remarks in return, they can often take it as a sign that their strategy is working well for them. Continue to act respectfully even if they do not.

CREATE RECORDS OF YOUR WORK

If you're worried about them taking credit for your work or discrediting your effort at a later stage, the simplest task to do is to keep a record of the work that you're doing and regularly update it. Provide updates on your tasks to your managers and teammates, share your ideas over email, ask questions to convey your understanding, etc. To avoid being blamed for a task

at a later stage, message to reconfirm that you have understood the task correctly or take notes on the minutes of the meeting to ensure that you are on the right track even if your narcissistic coworker doesn't communicate efficiently with you. Remember that you are responsible for your own work at the end of the day and prioritize that first. If it comes to it, document their behavior as well.

COMMUNICATE YOUR BOUNDARIES

It can often become necessary to communicate what you are or are not comfortable with when things get out of hand. Enter the conversation with a calm head and focus on the top points that you want to communicate instead of bringing up too many issues that will only make a mess of the situation and leave nothing resolved. Focus on behaviors that are inappropriate, abusive, invasive or the behaviors that make you most uncomfortable; once those are handled over time, you might be comfortable enough to work around them or in a better position to address the rest of the problems as well. Otherwise, they might change their behavior on one of the minor issues and then tell you that they've improved so you have no grounds to continue feeling negative about them.

While trying to communicate, welcome them to the conversation and ask them if there are any considerations they'd like you to keep in mind as well, instead of criticizing every aspect of their personality. It is often recommended to make "I" statements that focus on you rather than blame them, for example, "I am not comfortable with..." or "I have a hard time with..." This may soften the effect of what you're planning to say. Suggest solutions and welcome them to make suggestions as well rather than listing their flaws and asking them to solve them. While you work on being polite, also remember to be assertive and stand your ground on the major issues.

DON'T TRY TO "FIX" THEM

While learning how to deal with a narcissist at work, remember that your interaction with them starts and ends with work—you aren't in a position to change who they are and it might not be your place to do it either. It may or may not be possible to change their personality traits but the choice will be theirs on whether they want to do anything differently. All you can communicate is your preference for how they treat you at work. If the issue persists and matters get more serious, involve a third party, such as the HR team, and communicate your issue and requests to them.

When it comes to dealing with a narcissist at work, your best course of action is to keep to yourself but if that isn't possible try to set clear boundaries while you keep others informed of what is going on. That is not advice to gossip about your coworker but when things get difficult it might be time to make an official report of the offending behavior and how it has affected you. A narcissistic coworker may never change but you can do your best to ensure your day isn't ruined by it.