



## Thank You for Being Such a Pain:

### Dealing With Difficult People

Very few experiences bring us as much joy or as much sorrow as our relationships with other people.

Difficult people distract us, sap our energy, make us feel miserable, disappoint us, hurt our pride, refuse to give us our due, mistreat us, betray us, and can range from being a minor annoyance to being a source of major distress in our lives.

All of us struggle with difficult people in our daily lives: customers, co-workers, supervisors, family members, acquaintances, neighbors, or even strangers.

No matter how different the circumstances are, all encounters have one thing in common: *Every time we have an encounter with a difficult person, we have an uncomfortable emotional reaction.*

*Seek first to understand,  
then to be understood.*

—Stephen Covey

*You cannot make yourself feel  
something you do not, but you can  
make yourself do right  
in spite of your feelings.*

—Pearl Buck

*If we could read the secret of our enemies,  
we should find in each person's life  
sorrow and suffering enough  
to disarm all hostility.*

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

*The real art of conversation is not only  
to say the right thing in the right place,  
but to leave unsaid the wrong thing  
at the tempting moment.*

—Dorothy Nevill

Everyone is difficult to someone. Who we find difficult and who doesn't bother us is different for each person. Interestingly, people aren't difficult because of what they do. People are difficult when we experience unpleasant emotions as a result of their behavior.

Difficult people want the same attention, respect, and love that we all do. They just try to get it in ways that sometimes create problems for others.

Almost all difficult behaviors result from suffering, deprivation, or ignorance. We may despise people who are difficult with us, and we may condemn the way they behave, but we cannot with absolute certainty maintain that we would not do the same thing if we had lived through the same circumstances.

Our interpretations of people's behavior are often based on how we feel at the moment. If we are tired, angry, suspicious, etc., we will experience an interaction with a difficult person differently from how we experience it when we are feeling good. Also, our view of difficult people is based on our history. **All of our life experiences, hurts, mistakes, and previous encounters affect the way we view things now.**

When dealing with difficult people, we can do things that:

1. **Leave the situation unchanged.**
2. **Make the situation better.**
3. **Make the situation worse.**

In our society, dealing effectively with difficult people in all types of situations at work and in our personal lives can be a matter of life and death.

Mark I. Rosen, Ph.D., author of **Thank You for Being Such a Pain**, suggests that most difficult people are doing the

best they can, given their limitations, and that difficult people provide an unmatched opportunity to improve ourselves. The pain, frustration, and suffering we experience with certain people are just as important for our personal growth as love and joy. *The most difficult people have the potential to become our best teachers, because the adversity we experience in a difficult relationship can push us past our resistance and teach us what we would otherwise fail to learn.*

Everyone has something to teach us, but learning from others requires humility. If we are attentive and receptive, we will be surprised at the information and insight other people offer just by being who they are.

If we can change the way we view difficult people, we can change the way we feel about them. By looking for the good in others, we bring out the best in them.

We hope that the articles this month at <http://www.melbabenson.com/articles.php> will help in your understanding and effective management of the difficult people in all areas of your life:

“Why Are People Difficult”

“Options for Dealing With Difficult People”

“Talking With a Difficult Person”

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