

Why Are People Difficult?

Very few people are inherently rude or mean, although some may be. Usually when a person is rude, challenging, or otherwise difficult to help, there is a reason.

Here are some reasons why people may be difficult. Check the ones that may apply to you and your situations:

- 1. They are tired, frustrated, or ill.
- 2. They are confused or overwhelmed.
- 3. They are defending their ego or self-esteem.
- 4. They have never been in a similar situation before.
- 5. They feel ignored and feel that no one has listened to them.
- 6. They may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs (including prescription drugs).
- 7. They are mentally ill.
- 8. They don't speak or understand the language very well.
- 9. They have been treated poorly in similar circumstances in the past.
- 10. They are in a bad mood and take it out on you.
- 11. They aren't just having a bad day, they are having a bad life. (We often know very little about what really goes on in the lives of others.)
- 12. They are in a hurry or have waited an extended period of time for service.
- 13. They have never been taught behavior that most people take for granted, and they lack basic emotional awareness and skills.
- 14. They remind us of a difficult person in our past.
- 15. They are caught up in a position or role that requires them to act a certain way, and we are not aware of the entire situation.
- 16. They see the world differently from the way we do, and we fail to appreciate that their perspective may be as legitimate as ours.
- 17. They need to hold tightly to their beliefs to feel comfortable and secure.

When dealing with a difficult person, if we start asking ourselves why the person might be difficult, we may be able to begin the process of healing the relationship.

Some questions we might ask ourselves include the following:

1. How much do you really know about that person's life and background? Do you have concrete information or assumptions?
2. What additional information would you need to know from that person or from other sources to really understand why he/she acts that way?
3. How many different reasons could explain the person's behavior?
4. How accurate is your perception of the situation?
5. If you described the situation to someone not connected with you or the difficult person, would that person see the situation the way you do?
6. Have you been giving the person the benefit of the doubt or assuming negative intent?

Giving the person the benefit of the doubt does not mean that you:

- Approve of their behavior or accept things as they are.
- Excuse unacceptable behavior.
- Pretend that everything is fine when it isn't.
- Are prevented from taking action later.

Giving the person the benefit of the doubt means that you:

- Are willing to consider the possibility that you don't have all the facts and might not be seeing the whole picture.
 - Are willing to extend your goodwill to the other person until all the evidence is in.
 - Practice the same principle in your life that applies in a court of law: Difficult people are innocent until proven difficult.
7. Does your emotional reaction change as you consider alternative expectations?
 8. How would you behave if you were in that person's shoes? Would you be just as difficult or possibly worse?