



# how to deal with **DIFFICULT PEOPLE**

Perception Can Make  
All the Difference

## “Encounters with difficult people are opportunities to learn and grow.”

For most businesses, there is a need to interact with people in some way. That may be directly with customers, or working with employees, or your landlord. Growing your business means dealing with more and more people, which is the goal of any business. Not all of these people will be ideal. You will no doubt encounter people who will test your patience and your ability to diffuse a situation.

As business owners, we are always under a certain level of stress. How we manage that stress not only affects our health and mood, but also our efficiency and energy levels. The stress can cloud our judgement and limit our ability to see resolution. How we engage with “difficult” people can also affect these things.

Your perception can be the difference between stressful frustration and amiable resolution.

Encounters with difficult people are opportunities to learn and grow. Below are some things to consider the next time you are provided the opportunity. In this article, I focus on what you can control: your perception.

### Difficult people are your teachers.

When you maintain the perception that difficult people are your teachers, it can make it easier to approach interaction with them, no matter how unreasonable you believe them to be.

Ask yourself, what are they trying to teach me? It is a simple (not easy) shift in your perception but can change your attitude and behavior greatly. And not only that, it may provide some insight where you can understand yourself better. Be open to the lesson. It may reveal things that will make you a better person, in all your different roles in life, business and personal. It may take some time to fully understand, but you can train yourself to make the shift immediately.

I know it's easy to say until you are right in the heat of it with any person, but with consistent conscious effort to recognize

your triggers and adjust your reactions, with time and understanding you may develop control over your triggers to where there will be no reaction.

The perception drives the feeling of the encounter. With an understanding that this difficult person is here to stimulate growth in yourself, the judgement and resentment towards them can dissipate, and can even transition into sympathy or gratitude for them. I know that can be a long stretch for some, but it is possible. This can be an eye-opening experience and actually make them more tolerable to deal with.

You have to learn how to navigate an interaction and also how to control yourself. You can theorize how best to deal with someone, but there is no one method that will apply to all situations or people. Any and every interaction is dynamic, and you must learn through experience.

The good news is that being able to communicate and deal with different types of people will make you more seasoned and well rounded. The more difficult the person, and the more they incite a reaction from us, the greater the teacher. And the more we can grow.

### Don't take it personal.

Another way to utilize perception in your dealings with difficult people is to try to take yourself out of the situation. What I mean by that is to take the focus away from how you feel. I know what you are thinking but hear me out.

Like most people, when dealing with someone who I feel is difficult or downright ridiculous, I immediately focus on how that person is making me feel. It's a natural reaction to think of ourselves.

But what if you could put that feeling aside for one moment, long enough to be open and understanding? I know this can be very hard to do, especially if we feel like that person has done us wrong, whether intentional or not.

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We are all products of our environment, upbringing, experiences and choices. We are all trying to navigate life in our own way on our own journeys. Everyone is going through something and you never know what that may be. Kindness goes a long way when someone is in need in their life. People can be suffering, whether self-imposed or not. You just never know.

Making a conscious effort to remember this can help you take the focus off yourself. The issue in front of you may not even be about you. I am not giving bad people a pass, nor saying people are justified for being disrespectful. The point I am trying to make is that you can choose to think this way to help you to not take things personal.

This perception can completely change the dynamic of an interaction.

## To avoid or engage?

Most people will find that it is best to just totally avoid the people who trigger them, or incite anger, frustration, and resentment. That may be the best thing to do. Every situation is different. But what if it is not possible to avoid?

When I was running my 24-hour laundromat, it was next door to a liquor store in a rough neighborhood. I encountered a lot of “difficult” people. Whether they were customers, employees, the landlord, contractors, neighboring business owners, winos, gangs, drug dealers, drug addicts, or the homeless population that surrounded the location, one thing was certain: I could not just avoid them. I had to learn how to resolve any and every situation that I faced, and there were plenty.

The struggle was intense. And it took a while for me to learn how best to address any issues or confrontations. Through all the frustration came awareness. Not just awareness of how to resolve problems, but awareness of myself.

I realized that my perception was creating a lot of the suffering I experienced. I am not saying that my perception was creating the circumstances. Mostly, the circumstances were what they were. What I am saying is that how I viewed these experiences actually increased my stress levels. I also realized that I took a lot of things personal.

Shifting my perception and understanding that these difficult people were my teachers not only helped in my dealings with them, but also helped me recognize what I can control in each situation. I realized that taking things personal does not serve me in any way. Remembering that everyone is going through something and to approach these people with kindness, actu-

ally changed my attitude, which altered my behavior, and ultimately impacted my results and stress levels.

Especially in these current times, with the pandemic affecting all of our lives, you will come across many people (hopefully six feet away) who are under extraordinary levels of stress and operating with a very short fuse. We cannot control the circumstances, but we can control our perceptions when dealing with people. So, the next time class is in session, I hope these insights can help you in how you deal with “difficult” people.



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