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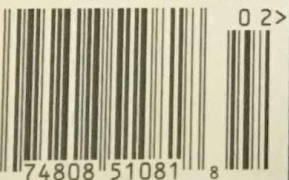
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float above the fray

Respond better to difficult people and they won't get you down.

PROBLEMATIC PEOPLE—like strident bosses, selfish colleagues, or indifferent salesclerks—invariably bring out the worst in us. They make us feel angry and helpless. If you deal with them on a daily basis, they can interfere with your health, your productivity, and, ultimately, your peace of mind.

To regain your equilibrium, you'll want to change the way you respond to difficult people, says Nando Pelusi, Ph.D., a licensed clinical psychologist in New York City. The goal is not only to find peace with them, he advises, but also to find ways to hop gracefully over common emotional pitfalls.

Here are some typical reactions and healthier ways to respond:

outrage

If your blood pressure rises every time you interact with difficult people, think of them as a hassle, not a horror, says Pelusi. Be assertive, not aggressive. Stand up for yourself by sticking to the facts without getting personal. And remember to take a deep breath and remind yourself that their behavior is about them, not you.

By TONI KLYM McLELLAN

obsession

If you continually obsess about difficult relationships, you may be falling prey to the idea that you can change people. "Usually you're thinking, 'There's a right way to behave, and it should apply to everyone,'" says Pelusi. Challenge your inner demand for uniform, fair, or kind treatment, he advises, and recognize that some people will always be obnoxious. Once you lower your expectations, you can reduce obsession to a healthy annoyance. Think of difficult people as obstacles in the road—accept that they exist so you can swerve around them instead of colliding with them.

hurt feelings

Acting wounded can fuel a difficult person's negative behavior, adds Pelusi. "Difficult people take advantage of those who need approval." You don't have to squelch your emotional nature, but you do want to lessen your vulnerability. First, imagine your typical reaction to difficult behavior. Then visualize changing your emotion from hurt to indifference. With practice, your body will learn to respond with greater calm in real situations. ✦



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