



C.A.R.E.

Career and Resilience Education Program

Dealing with Difficult People

The NSW Police Force is a melting pot of different personalities all working together to achieve the same goal.

We have all encountered *that* colleague in the workplace. The one who dominates team meetings, takes credit for everyone's ideas, misses deadlines or leaves the work for someone else, complains incessantly, or sits back and shirks responsibility. They can slow work down and take the fun and productivity out of a good team.

With many different generations, working styles and cultural backgrounds working together, there is bound to be a time when you encounter a difficult person. It is important to arm yourself with information to adapt and deal with this and ensure a harmonious working life.

- ▶ [Who is the difficult person?](#)
- ▶ [Types of Difficult People](#)
- ▶ [5 Elements for Effectively Dealing with Difficult People](#)
- ▶ [General tips for coping with a difficult personality at work](#)
- ▶ [Communication strategies for dealing with a difficult person at work](#)

Who is the difficult person?

In many cases, people we may think are difficult are really just different. Their personalities may clash with ours. Often, once you learn to identify other people's styles, and honestly assess them against your own, you might find you can figure out why you're having a problem with a particular type of person and this might help you better deal with it.

The aim of this article is to give you some general tips on the types of difficult personalities you may encounter in the workplace. It is intended as general information only relating to dealing with colleagues and not general members of the public.

Types of Difficult People

The Know-It-All Bulldozer

The Bulldozer – or Know-It-All – are those that think they are the experts. They are usually pushy people who can be gruff, insensitive and blunt. They often act like the ideas and knowledge of others is irrelevant. They say things straight out that others would mention with more diplomacy. They can often be impatient and use sarcasm when others try to voice their opinions. Often the bulldozer doesn't realise they are like they are and wouldn't realise they were causing offence.

When dealing with a Bulldozer you need to stand your ground, and encourage them to consider alternative scenarios without challenging their expertise. Always make sure you have accurate information about the topic for discussion. If they are taking over a meeting, acknowledge their input and then politely provide your thoughts. Introduce possible alternatives, such as: *"You make some great points and I understand where you are coming from but we could also consider this..."*.

Before designating someone a bulldozer, look at your own personality – is it just a matter of a personality clash?

The Sniper

Snipers are those people who will wait for the opportune moment to try to undermine or discredit you. They often do this in a meeting or in a social scene, at a time where there is least likely for a rebuttal.

The number one rule when dealing with a sniper is to remain calm, no matter how insulting or infuriating their comments are. Next, bring their behaviour to the forefront – Snipers generally hate to be singled out and will lose power and credibility when their behaviour is exposed.

Look them directly in the eye and ask: *"what do you mean by that comment?"* Maintain good eye contact and body language. Be confident and don't be afraid to politely push the point if their behaviour continues.

The Complainer

The Complainer will find fault with everything. They are usually the person who finds fault but no solution.

The first step in dealing with a Complainer is to listen to their complaint and get specific information. Acknowledge what they are saying by repeating the complaint back to them: *"I understand what you are saying is...."*. Make sure you don't agree with the Complainer – there is a difference between acknowledging and agreeing. If you agree with them you are validating their complaint.

Move quickly to problem-solving. Ask: *"what is the real source of the problem?"*. Encourage them to gather more facts, if necessary, as this might identify a real problem that you can work on together. It may also help the Complainer to see that the complaint is unjustified and help the Complainer to see the other side of the story.

The Indecisive

The Indecisive is the person who can't make a decision. Or they put off making a decision that they think might upset the apple cart.

Rather than participate in your team, they may stand back and let the decisions be made for them.

To deal with the Indecisive, help them make you understand why it is so difficult for them to make a decision: *"I need you to make a decision so that..."*. Take cues from what's not said, such as a hesitation. Help them reduce the number of alternative decisions they have to make: *"It sounds like we have two real options here, 'option one' and 'option two' – which do you think is best?"* Once they have made a decision, support them.

The Bully

The Bully is the person who makes repeated hurtful remarks, making fun of your work or you as a person (such as your family, sexuality, race or culture or education background). They exclude you from work activities, humiliate you, gang up on you or intimidate you and make you feel undervalued. The Bully can make work an extremely unpleasant experience.

Unfortunately, the Bully can often work in a way that initially others can't see their behaviour – it is targeted just towards you.

Workplace bullying is a serious issue that can have a long-term effect on a person and if you feel you are being bullied you should report this to your supervisor. Unfortunately, serial bullies will often not stop unless their attention is brought to the forefront.

Other general tips for dealing with the Bully early on are:

- Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself – tell the Bully to stop. This is of course more difficult than it sounds but you can try a few simple gestures to bring it to the forefront, such as directly asking them to stop.
- Always keep calm. Flying off the handle will only escalate the issue and not necessarily work in your favour.
- Keep a record of the bullying – even if you're not sure that you are being bullied, keeping a journal of this can help you decide if you are/are not being bullied and whether you need to seek help from your supervisor.
- Consult with a work colleague who you trust – it can help to have a discussion with someone about what you are experiencing and it will also help to back up your story.
- Most importantly, report bullying to your supervisor and make sure you follow it up to ensure something is being done. Don't let bullying go on without being dealt with as it will become a bigger issue.

5 Elements for Effectively Dealing with Difficult People

As a general rule, there are five elements that can be used when dealing with difficult people, no matter their personality type.

1. Stay calm and don't lose control! Don't fear their emotion.
2. Know specifically what you want to gain from the situation.

3. Collect information about the person's personality.
4. Pay close attention to what you are being told.
5. Be flexible when dealing with people – each personality type is different and will respond differently to different approaches.

General tips for coping with a difficult personality at work

- Stop wishing the person was different. They are who they are and rather than wish they were someone else you are far better to learn how to deal with them.
- Have a strategy for dealing with the difficult personality and be flexible in your approach.
- Know your boundaries and know your limitations – you can only do what you can do and if dealing with someone is above your abilities, don't be afraid to seek advice, such as from your supervisor.

Communication strategies for dealing with a difficult person at work

- **Always remain calm.**
- Acknowledge the situation and repeat or paraphrase what has been said to you or the situation as you understand it.
- Always listen, no matter the type of personality that you are listening to.
- Look for problem solving solutions.
- Where possible, finish on a positive note.