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On the topic:
Managing Challenging Patients and Staff
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Managing Challenging Patients and Staff

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Overview

• Many of us spend countless hours at work daily. For the majority of full-time workers, more time may be spent at work than any where outside of one's home.

• We may spend more time with our coworkers and colleagues than with our family and friends.

• That said, dealing with difficult personalities in the office (including patients) can really take a toll on one's health and well-being, as well as on the entire company or organization.
• If you’ve ever dealt with a particularly difficult coworker, you may have found yourself avoiding that person at work, perhaps changing your schedule or taking a different route in and out of your building.

• You may have even found yourself fantasizing about their departure or considering your own just to get away from him or her.

• Although you may be able to find some humor in it, at the end of the day difficult workplace personalities can be very upsetting for all of those who have the misfortune of sharing time, space, and job tasks with them.

• Before learning more about difficult personalities and how to handle them, it is important to understand personality.

• Personality is the sum of characteristics and traits that define a person's typical thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in over time (Malik, 2007).

• Those who have personality traits that are considered outside of the norm and potentially harmful to themselves and/or others may have a personality disorder.
According to the American Psychiatric Association, “personality disorders are associated with ways of thinking and feeling about oneself and others that significantly and adversely affect how an individual functions in many aspects of life.”

Examples of personality disorders include antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder.

These disorders create extreme behaviors in those who have them, but even people without personality disorders can display traits from them which may appear in the workplace.

Researchers have found that traits of narcissism (i.e., a sense of entitlement and a lack of empathy for others) are higher in Generation Y or Millennials (sometimes referred to as "Generation Me") than in previous generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).
How Do Difficult Personalities Impact Your Office?

- Difficult personalities can negatively affect the well-being of co-workers as well as the entire office.
- Workplace incivility has been shown to affect the majority of workers in the U.S. (96%) according to one study and result in lower productivity and time spent at work, in addition to other negative consequences (Porath & Pearson, 2010).
- Examples of "toxic behaviors" that can damage the workplace environment include belittling comments, gossip, double standards, yelling at others, and taking credit for the work of others (Holloway & Kusy, 2009).

Even in the absence of difficult personalities, personality styles that do not work well together can result in conflict. Indeed, conflicting personality styles is a common cause of workplace conflict and incivility (Gatlin, Wysocki, & Kepner, 2008).

- Problems can occur over the way that people prefer to accomplish tasks or interact with one another. For example, an employee may prefer not to socialize. He or she may limit distractions by keeping the office door closed. Others may view this as unfriendly or even rude behavior.
Managing and Resolving Conflict in a Positive Way

• Conflict is a normal and even healthy part of relationships. Two people can't be expected to agree on every thing at all times. Since conflicts in relationship are inevitable, learning to deal with them in a healthy way is crucial. When conflict is mismanaged, it can harms relationships.
• When handled in a respectful and positive way, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, and ultimately strengthens the bond between two people.
• By learning the skills of conflict resolution, you can keep your personal and professional relationships strong and successful.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION
The Fundamentals of Conflict Resolution

• Conflict arises from differences. It occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires.

• Sometimes these differences look trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal and relational need is at the core of the problem—i.e., the need to feel safe and secure, the need to feel respected and valued, or the need for greater closeness and intimacy.

Recognizing and Resolving Conflicting Needs

• If you are out of touch with your feelings or so stressed that you can only pay attention to a limited number of emotions, you may not be able to understand your own needs. If you don’t understand your deep-seated needs, you will have a hard time communicating with others and staying in touch with what is really troubling you.

• An example is when couples often argue about petty differences—i.e., the way she hangs the towels, the way he parts his hair—rather than address what is really bothering them.
• In personal relationships, a lack of understanding about differing needs can result in distance, arguments, and breakups. In workplace conflicts, differing needs are often at the heart of bitter disputes.

• When you can recognize the legitimacy of conflicting needs and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens pathways to creative problem solving, team building, and improved relationships. When you resolve conflict and disagreement quickly and painlessly, mutual trust will flourish.

Unhealthy Responses to Conflict

• Unhealthy responses to conflict are characterized by:
  – An inability to recognize and respond to matters of great importance to the other person
  – Explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions
  – The withdrawal of love, resulting in rejection, isolation, shaming, and fear of abandonment
  – The expectation of bad outcomes
  – The fear and avoidance of conflict
Healthy Responses to Conflict

• Healthy responses to conflict are characterized by:
  – The capacity to recognize and respond to important matters
  – A readiness to forgive and forget
  – The ability to seek compromise and avoid punishing
  – A belief that resolution can support the interests and needs of both parties

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PERSONALITIES
#1: The Gossip

- A common difficult personality type found in many office environments is "the gossip." It is common knowledge that people like this get their title from talking about other people (often behind their backs) and spreading rumors about others which are oftentimes untrue or exaggerated versions of the truth.

- If you have ever found yourself in a conversation with the gossip at your office, you probably know what to expect from them. You may have even found yourself the victim of their bad habits, maybe without even realizing it.

- Office gossips often behave this way out of their own insecurities or to create drama in order to entertain themselves. Indeed, talking about other people may be a way to deflect attention away from their own negative traits (i.e., poor work performance) or a way to create situations that they find amusing.

- Gossips may also hold the misguided belief that their gossip is a way to connect with other coworkers with whom they share their gossip.
To Communicate Effectively with the Gossip

- One communication strategy is to directly tell the person the impact of their behavior on you; i.e., “I felt really upset by the comment you made about me to Jane.”
- Try staying out of gossipy conversations and avoid sharing details of your personal life with the office gossip.
- Attribute their behavior to their own faults and insecurities instead of taking what they may say personally (Orloff, 2014).
- Let go of the idea that gossip within the office can be controlled and instead focus on your own behavior and setting a good example for others (Kiplinger, 2011).

#2: The Blamer

- Blamers are another type of difficult personalities found in many workplaces. For sure, there are times when most of us find ourselves pointing the finger at someone else when perhaps we were the cause of a situation or problem.
- Blamers (also referred to as "guilt trippers") are those who constantly shift responsibility away from themselves and onto others whenever things go wrong in the office.
- Rarely do they acknowledge or apologize for their own misgivings, mistakes, bad decisions, or poor performance. Often, they stretch the truth in order to convince others that their version of events is accurate and factual even when it's not.
To Communicate Effectively with the Blamer

• Redirect their attention away from blame and toward facts that are verifiable (Murphy, 2014).

• Own up to any mistakes that you've actually made if they attempt to "guilt trip" you instead of engaging in the blame game with them and pointing the finger right back (Orloff, 2014). This can help stop the pattern that many blamers create of finger pointing back and forth with others and putting them on the defense.

• Maintain firm boundaries around the blamer and try not to let them push you to a point that you're uncomfortable with. Getting a blamer to see his or her own part in work-related problems may prove more difficult but creating your own safety and limits around them can usually be achieved with some careful effort.

#3: The Flyer

• This difficult workplace personality is the highly emotional type who may “fly off the handle” at any time. They may also be called the “drama queen” or “drama king” and are very emotionally reactive people (Miller, 2014). Such people may have traits of histrionic personality disorder even if they do not have the disorder itself.

• This personality type will show a "pattern of excessive emotionality, attention-seeking, need for excitement, [act] flamboyant theatrically in speech and behavior, and use of exaggeration to maintain largely superficial relationships for the purpose of getting emotional needs met" (Miller, 2003, p. 427).
• You may find yourself drawn to this type of person in the office when they're in a good mood because they can be funny, entertaining, and energetic.
• However, when types like this feel like they're needs are not getting met they may "fly off the handle" so to speak and became very angry and dramatic. They may also be unreliable in following through with tasks and bad about making decisions based on emotions instead of facts and data (Miller, 2003).

To Communicate Effectively With the Flyer

• Use praise for the value they bring to the office before delivering any critiques.
• Communicate how their behavior affects you if you are impacted by their mood swings.
• Remain calm. When they fly off the handle, try to calm them down if at all possible.
• Realize that you may be unable to change many of their behaviors. Protect your own interests during times you find yourself in the unfortunate position of dealing with their high emotionality.
4: The Control Freak

• This difficult workplace personality is the type who is often nitpicky and critical of others who do not do things their way. Such people may have traits of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) even if they do not have the disorder itself.

• They often feel the need to control the outcome of seemingly everything and everyone around them and may even step over appropriate boundaries and attempt to control situations that aren't relevant to their own job duties.

• They may also be perfectionists and have impossibly high expectations for themselves and others. However, they may be a valuable asset to your company or organization due to their high attention to detail.

To Communicate Effectively with the Control Freak

• Some strategies you may consider:
  – Give praise for attention to detail and contributions to your workplace.
  – Provide details to avoid ambiguity that may raise their anxiety levels.
  – Letting go of control when the situation or task does not matter as much to you or will not have an adverse effect on your performance.
  – Do not take it personally when they're need for controlling is at its peak.
#5: The Victim

- The victim is yet another difficult personality type and is an obvious one to spot. This is the person who is often a constant complainer and attempts to draw people's attention to their problems (or perceived problems) every day.

- For example, they may complain about their work duties and try to convince everyone that they aren't treated fairly and have more work than everyone around them. They may play the victim when something goes wrong on a team project and claim that they were left out of important conversations.

- One study identified common personality traits of workplace victims and found that they "tended to be less independent and extroverted, less stable, and more conscientious than non-victims" (Coynea, Seignea & Randall, 2010, p.33)

In Order to Communicate Effectively with the Office Victim

- Try to exercise patience during conversations. See that they actually believe they have been victimized, regardless of whether or not there's any factual evidence to support it.

- Try to point out evidence to the contrary when they begin complaining about their bad circumstances. For example, if they claim that they were intentionally left out of conversations it may help to highlight the fact that they were on sick leave when certain conversations happened and that you and other coworkers didn't want to overwhelm them when they returned.
• Try to empathize with them while being careful not to support their tendency toward helplessness.

• This can be tricky. If they complain to you about something that happened to them at work, try responding with:
  – “I'm sorry that happened to you and upset you so much. Is there anything you can do to change that situation?” This will help validate their feelings and highlight the fact that they could try taking responsibility for changing the circumstances that upset them.

• Maintain your own boundaries during conversations and do not let them draw you in to constant complaining about the same topics. A simple statement like “I know this is important to you and I'm sorry I don't have time to listen more, but I must go back to my desk and get some work done.”

### #6: The Quiet Type

• The quiet type of personality is a self-explanatory one and often easy to pick out in an office. This type is not necessarily a difficult personality but can be a confusing one.

• This is the person who is usually aloof in the office, and may sit at their desk a lot (instead of conversing at the water cooler or joining everyone for lunch).

• This person may close themselves off to others by hiding behind their cubicle, keeping their office door shut, or wearing headphones.
Some Tips for Effective Communication with the Quiet Type

- Not pushing them to communicate or fraternize.
- Giving them more space and time than others to respond to you and communicate their thoughts and feelings.
- Acknowledging their place and value to the organization even if they add little value to the office environment socially.
- Take some time to get to know what makes him or her tick and show an interest in them as a person.
- Do not take it personally if they do not interact with you as do your other coworkers.

#7: The Passive-Aggressive Type

- Passive-aggressive types can make very difficult coworkers to interact with, as they may not be as easy to spot as others and can do real damage.
- They behave in phony ways (i.e., by hiding their true feelings and pretending everything is okay when they're actually upset). These personalities have a tendency to appear calm, cool, and collected at all times since they keep their negative feelings pushed deep down.
- A classic sign of this type is the fact that they may do things to sabotage the work or performance of others, or get revenge in other ways (i.e., stealing someone's lunch).
In Order to Communicate with the Passive-Aggressive One in the Office

- Avoid reciprocating passive-aggressive behaviors and confront problems with them out in the open, using tact and good timing for conversations.
- Use direct communication to communicate the impact of their negative behaviors on you, your coworkers, and the office environment. i.e., “I felt disrespected when you showed up late to my presentation.”
- Express interest in their true feelings and create a safe space for them to feel heard and validated.

#8: The Paranoid One

- The paranoid coworker is often portrayed on TV and in films. This type can be equally entertaining and frustrating to deal with. People may have traits of paranoid personality disorder even if they do not have the disorder itself.
- These traits include being constantly suspicious of other people and their motives, distrusting other people without cause, and interpreting the behaviors of other people in very negative ways (i.e., “She did that because she's out to get me fired!”)
To Communicate with the Paranoid One in Your Office

- Exercise caution with what you say to him or her, and recognize that your words may be spun very differently in their head.
- Offer fact-based and rational information and explanations to him or her for why certain decisions or developments occurred.
- Avoid getting too caught up in changing their perceptions of reality, even if such perceptions seem odd to you and others around them.

#9: The Narcissist

- The office narcissist may be one of the most difficult workplace personalities to deal with. Such people can also be described as egomaniacs and are often found within the management levels of many companies and organizations. They may show traits of narcissistic personality disorder or even have the disorder itself.

- The office narcissist will show a "pattern of grandiosity, entitlement, need for admiration, lack of empathy for others' feelings or opinions and expecting unearned high praise regardless of their actual effort or accomplishment" (Miller, 2003, p.428).
• These types will often evaluate their own work performance more favorably than it is in reality (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006).

• They may be arrogant, annoying to deal with, and disliked by many people. Conversely, they may be very charismatic and actually liked by many coworkers (Orloff, 2014).

• This type of personality can be toxic to the workplace and will attempt to control situations and gain support for their inflated self view regardless of how it may damage those around them or their relationships.

To Communicate With the Office Narcissist

• Use flattery or stroke their ego a bit if it helps get the job done.

• Communicate how demands of them may actually benefit them (Orloff, 2014). Narcissists are very self-focused and care about their needs and desires, often at the exclusion of others.

• Offer a positive about their performance before delivering any criticisms.

• Praise them openly (i.e., on a chain email) if it is deserved. Narcissists respond to praise and social approval in office environments (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).

• Maintain realistic expectations of how they will likely respond during conversations and situations. Do not expect something different from them just because their behavior rubs you the wrong way.
#10: The Psychopath

- The psychopath falls under the abnormal psychology and can be a very harmful type of person in the workplace.

- Some people may have traits of antisocial personality disorder even if they do not have the disorder itself. This personality disorder is defined by "a pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others" (APA, 2013a, p.645).

- People who are psychopathic (aka sociopathic) have a tendency toward intentional harm of others including deceit and manipulation. They may take the credit for work done by others, purposefully deceive others in order to "win" even if their actions are very damaging, unethical, or illegal, or act in other reckless and predatory ways like stealing from the company or the company's clients.

- The good news is that true psychopaths are a rare breed, composing only 3.3% of adults within the general population (APA, 2013).

- If you work with a psychopathic person, do not expect them to feel remorse for their actions as people like this often take pleasure in their negative impact on others. Because of this, effective communication with a coworker like this may be nearly impossible.

- Depending on your organization culture, if the psychopath is revealed for his or her true nature, they may be fired or self-destruct.
• In the rare case that you do find yourself having to work with a person like this your best recourse is to be clear about your own boundaries and attempt to communicate them to this person.

• **For example:**
  – If this person tries to draw you into unethical behavior try a statement like "You can do that but please don't involve me - that crosses the line for me."

• It is highly unlikely that you will change their behaviors in any way but using clear, direct, and firm communication may save you from getting caught up in their deceitful ways.

• Ultimately, we all find ourselves dealing with difficult personalities at some point during our lives.

• Understanding what personality is and the common difficult personality types helps to successfully navigate relationships with coworkers and manage challenging patients.
How To Handle Difficult and Unreasonable People

1. Keep Your Cool
2. “Fly Like an Eagle”
3. Be Proactive, not Reactive
4. Pick Your Battles
5. Separate the Person From the Issue
6. Put the Spotlight on Them
7. Use Appropriate Humor
8. Change from Following to Leading
9. Confront Bullies (Safely)
10. Set Consequence(s)

Tips, Tools & Techniques

• Accept that we all have different personalities
• Commit to understanding the different personalities and learning effective ways to deal with them
• Practice social awareness tips; improve communication by being aware of sensitivities
Resources

- https://www.universalclass.com/articles/business/difficult-workplace

Questions?

- Thank you for your attendance!

- Get your questions answered on PMI's Discussion Forum: http://www.pmimd.com/pmiForums/rules.asp