



PROBLEM SOLVING: REASON, RESPONSE, RECOMMENDATION AND RESOLUTIONS FOR OFFICIALS

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH A UNREASONABLE PERSON

HOW DO YOU REACT?



20 TACTICS FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

- DEALING WITH PEOPLE THAT ARE BEHAVING UNREASONABLY MOST PEOPLES **FEAR** RESPONSE CENTER IN YOUR **BRAIN** (THE FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE PART) IS GOING TO BE ACTIVATED.
- THIS PART OF THE BRAIN CAN'T DISTINGUISH BETWEEN A PERSON THAT'S YELLING AT YOU OR A VICIOUS DOG ABOUT TO ATTACK YOU.
- IT'S UP TO *YOU* TO ENGAGE YOUR CONSCIOUS MIND IN ORDER TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION.
- SOME OF THESE TIPS ARE GENERAL, SUGGESTING A MINDSET TO CULTIVATE. OTHERS ARE MORE SPECIFIC IN ADVISING YOU WHAT TO DO IN THE MOMENT.

LISTENING

- LISTENING IS THE NUMBER ONE STEP IN DEALING WITH "UNREASONABLE" PEOPLE. SHARE WITH US SOME EXAMPLES OF THIS TYPE OF BEHAVIOR.
- EVERYONE WANTS TO FEEL HEARD.
- **NO PROGRESS CAN TAKE PLACE UNTIL THE OTHER PERSON FEELS ACKNOWLEDGED.**
- WHILE YOU'RE LISTENING, REALLY FOCUS ON WHAT THE OTHER PERSON IS SAYING, NOT WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY NEXT.

STAY CALM

- WHEN A SITUATION IS EMOTIONALLY CHARGED, IT'S EASY TO GET CAUGHT UP IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT. MONITOR YOUR BREATHING. TRY TO TAKE SOME SLOW, DEEP BREATHS.
 - IN THROUGH THE NOSE AND OUT THROUGH THE MOUTH

DON'T JUDGE

- YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THE OTHER PERSON IS GOING THROUGH. CHANCES ARE, IF A PERSON IS ACTING UNREASONABLE, THEY ARE LIKELY FEELING SOME SORT OF VULNERABILITY OR FEAR.
 - ARE YOU HAVING A BAD DAY?

REFLECT RESPECT AND DIGNITY TOWARD THE OTHER PERSON

NO MATTER HOW A PERSON IS
TREATING YOU, SHOWING CONTEMPT
WILL NOT HELP PRODUCTIVELY
RESOLVE THE SITUATION.

WHAT STRATEGIES CAN YOU DO TO
DE-ESCALATE THE SITUATION?



LOOK FOR THE HIDDEN NEED.

- **WHAT IS THIS PERSON REALLY TRYING TO GAIN?**
 - **WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY?**
- **WHAT IS THIS PERSON TRYING TO AVOID?**
 - **WHAT HAVE YOU DISCOVERED THAT THEY DIDN'T DO?**

HOW ARE YOU REACTING?

- DO A CHECK ON HOW YOU ARE RESPONDING TO THE PERSON:
 - ARE YOU OPEN AND INTERESTED TO WHAT THE PERSON'S PROBLEM IS?
 - ARE YOU USING POSITIVE BODY LANGUAGE?
 - WHAT IS THE TONE OF YOUR VOICE WHEN YOU ARE COMMUNICATING WITH THE PERSON?
 - HOW CAN YOU CALM THE SITUATION?
 - DO YOU REPEAT BACK TO THEM THEIR CONCERN TO ASSURE YOU HAVE IT CORRECT?
 - DO YOU LOOK UP THE RULE WITH THEM?
 - DO EXPRESS A DESIRE TO HEAR THEIR CONCERN AND TO ALSO TRY AND HELP THEM?

LOOK FOR OTHERS AROUND YOU WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP.

- IS THERE A COLLEAGUE CLOSE BY THAT MIGHT BE ABLE TO ASSIST?
- WHEN HAVING DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS WITH PEOPLE IT IS ALWAYS GOOD TO HAVE ANOTHER PERSON PRESENT.
- BE PREPARED BEFORE YOU TALK WITH THE PERSON, HAVE YOUR QUESTIONS READY AND HAVE YOUR FACTS.
- TAKE NOTES IF YOU NEED. SHOW THEM THE NOTES SO YOU HAVE THEIR INFO.

DON'T DEMAND COMPLIANCE

- FOR EXAMPLE, TELLING SOMEONE WHO'S UPSET TO BE QUIET AND CALM DOWN WILL JUST MAKE HIM OR HER IRATE. INSTEAD:
 - ASK THE PERSON WHAT THEY ARE UPSET ABOUT
 - ALLOW THE PERSON TO SHARE THEIR STORY FULLY WITHOUT INTERRUPTING
 - YOU CAN SAY: WOULD IT BE HELPFUL FOR ME TO GIVE YOU A FEW MINUTES?
 - IF YOU ARE DEALING WITH RULES HAVE THE RULE OUT AND AVAILABLE TO REVIEW

SAYING, "I UNDERSTAND," USUALLY MAKES THINGS WORSE.

SAY: "TELL ME MORE SO I CAN UNDERSTAND BETTER."

-GIVE THE PERSON THE CHANCE TO TELL YOU THE ENTIRE STORY!

-BE SINCERE AND EMPATHETIC, YOU MAY HAVE THE FACTS BUT LISTEN AGAIN, SOMETIMES YOU CAN HEAR SOMETHING THAT YOU MISSED BEFORE.

-HAVE AN OPEN ATTITUDE TO HEAR THEIR SIDE OF THE STORY.

-GIVE THEM THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT?

-LOOK FOR THE FACTS: DON'T ASSUME



AVOID SMILING, AS THIS MAY LOOK LIKE YOU ARE MOCKING THE PERSON

- SIMILARLY, HUMOR CAN SOMETIMES LIGHTEN THE MOOD, BUT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, IT'S RISKY AND IT MAY BACKFIRE.
- LISTEN, MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT, NOD AT APPROPRIATE TIMES, DON'T INTERRUPT
- REPEAT TO THE PERSON WHAT THEY HAVE SAID TO GET THE FACTS STRAIGHT

DON'T ACT DEFENSIVELY.

- THIS IS TOUGH. YOU'RE NATURALLY NOT ENJOYING THE OTHER PERSON SAYING NASTY THINGS OR THINGS THAT YOU KNOW AREN'T TRUE.
- YOU'RE GOING TO WANT THE PERSON TO SHARE THE FACTS AND YOU WANT TO RECEIVE THE FACTS IN A NON-THREATENING WAY.
- IF THE PERSON IS SO EMOTIONALLY REVVED UP, IT'S NOT GOING TO HELP TO BE DEFENSIVE, REMEMBER, THIS IS NOT ABOUT *YOU*. DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY. (I KNOW, EASIER SAID THAN DONE.)

DON'T RETURN ANGER WITH ANGER

- RAISING YOUR VOICE, POINTING YOUR FINGER, OR SPEAKING DISRESPECTFULLY TO THE OTHER PERSON WILL ADD FUEL TO AN ALREADY HEATED SITUATION.
- USE A LOW, CALM, EVEN MONOTONE VOICE. DON'T TRY TO TALK OVER THE PERSON. WAIT UNTIL THE PERSON TAKES A BREATH AND THEN SPEAK.
- LOWERING YOUR VOICE AND TALKING VERY QUIETLY AND ALMOST SLOWLY HELPS TO NOT ENCOURAGE THE ESCALATION OF THE SITUATION.
- ASK THE PERSON IF YOU CAN REVIEW THEIR INFORMATION WITH THEM AGAIN. GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE MORE INFORMATION.

DON'T ARGUE OR TRY TO CONVINCE THE OTHER PERSON OF ANYTHING.

GIVE THE PERSON THE OPPORTUNITY TO AGAIN PROVIDE
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SITUATION.

DIFFUSE THE SITUATION BY SAYING LET ME SHARE THIS
INFORMATION WITH (ORGANIZER, TD, PGJ, ETC) TO DISCUSS AND
REVIEW.

IT IS OKAY TO SAY YOU SEEM UPSET ABOUT THIS I WANT TO LOOK
AT THE INFORMATION THAT YOU HAVE AND I WANT YOU TO HELP
ME UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION.

FOCUS ON THE FACTS NOT THE EMOTIONS



SAYING YOU ARE SORRY

SAYING, "I'M SORRY," OR, "I'M GOING TO TRY TO FIX THIS," CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARD DEFUSING MANY SITUATIONS.

IF YOU ARE WRONG OR IF YOU MAKE A WRONG ASSUMPTION THAT IS NOT BASED ON FACTS THEN WE SHOULD SAY WE ARE WRONG, OR WE DIDN'T HAVE ALL THE FACTS WHEN THE DECISION WAS MADE.



KEEP EXTRA SPACE BETWEEN YOU AND THE OTHER PERSON.

- YOUR INSTINCT MAY BE TO TRY TO CALM THE OTHER PERSON DOWN BY PUTTING YOUR ARM ON THEIRS, OR SOME OTHER SIMILAR GESTURE THAT MAY BE APPROPRIATE IN OTHER CONTEXTS. BUT IF SOMEONE IS ALREADY UPSET, AVOID TOUCH, AS IT MIGHT BE MISINTERPRETED.
- GIVE THE PERSON A RESPECTFUL PROFESSIONAL DISTANCE

ONE RESPONSE DOES NOT FIT ALL

- YOU HAVE TO REMAIN FLEXIBLE. ALTHOUGH THESE GUIDELINES HAVE PROVEN EFFECTIVE IN DE-ESCALATING TOUGH SITUATIONS, EVERY PERSON IS UNIQUE AND MAY RESPOND DIFFERENTLY.
- YOU MAY HAVE TO CHANGE STRIDES IN MID STREAM.

AFTER THE SITUATION

- **DEBRIEF.** AFTER THE SITUATION IS OVER, TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED.
- **DISCHARGE YOUR OWN STRESS.** YOU HAD TO PUT YOUR NATURAL REACTIONS ON HOLD FOR A WHILE. NOW IS THE TIME TO DISCHARGE SOME OF THAT PENT UP ADRENALINE. DON'T LET THE EMOTIONS STAY STUCK IN YOUR BODY.
 - YOU CAN STEP OUT OF THE BUILDING AND TAKE A WALK AROUND THE BUILDING
 - DO SOMETHING TO BE ABLE TO MOVE ON.

GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT FOR GETTING THROUGH AN UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION.

IT TAKES A LOT OF ENERGY NOT TO ACT LIKE A JERK WHEN
SOMEONE ELSE IS BEHAVING BADLY. DON'T SKIP THIS STEP!



CREDITS

- **BARBARA MARKWAY, PH.D**
- **PSYCHOLOGY TODAY; 20 TIPS FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE.**
- **MARCH 2015**