

Make It Stick

*Activity Pack*

Dealing with Difficult People

 **Helping lessons learned through training become part of *how we work*.**

**To the Learner Leader…**

This suite of activities has been designed to reinforce the key learning from the **Dealing with Difficult People** course. They have been designed to be led by team leaders or designated trainers and do not require training experience, though for best results we recommend that whoever is leading the activities understands the principles of adult learning and has some experience in leading learning activities.

The suite of activities will provide you with up to six months of learning reinforcement. We recommend that an activity is run each month following the Dealing with Difficult People course.

When running each activity:

* Ask the group to reflect back on the original course they attended:
  + What takeaways did they have?
  + What have they tried to implement?
  + When revisiting some of these activities for a second time, ask them what additional ideas or thoughts they have in applying the concepts and tools in the activities to their job.

Each activity will take 10-15 minutes to run depending on the size of the group.

There is one activity to a page. Each activity has a brief introduction followed by instructions for the learner leader.

We suggest the following to optimise your learning experience:

* Have the group meet away from their normal workspace
* Make sure mobile devices are switched off so that everyone fully engages
* Make the environment ‘safe’ and encourage everyone to contribute
* Run these activities with everyone standing – try running them outdoors in the fresh air
* Have other team members take the lead and run an activity – this will build confidence and leadership skills
* Don’t be afraid to improvise – the learning needs to be about you and your group so make it meaningful
* When debriefing an activity, get the group to reflect on what the activity means for them and what they will do differently or continue to do that underscores the learning points from the activity

**Activities in this pack**

1. Dealing with passive and aggressive behaviour
2. Responding assertively using ‘I’ statements
3. Saying ‘no’
4. Dealing with bullies
5. Identifying discriminatory behaviour
6. Reasonable management action

**Activity 1: Dealing with passive and aggressive behaviour**

**Introduction**

Knowing how to respond to passive and aggressive behaviour will assist you in dealing with colleagues or direct reports who display such behaviour.

**Instructions**

Go through the following ways of responding to passive and aggressive behaviour. Ask the group for examples of ‘How’ they can respond.

**Passive**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What you can do** | **How you can do it** |
| Challenge self-deprecating behaviour | * Show that you value the other person's contribution * Show that you are interested in what they have to say * Use encouraging language |
| Create safe places in which to conduct conversations | * Respect the person's privacy * Earn their trust to keep information confidential |
| Challenge any blame games being voiced | * Focus on facts * Attach reasons to actions and behaviours, not personalities |
| Maintain eye contact during conversation | * Force the dynamic by sitting in front of the other person * Only proceed with dialogue if the person maintains eye contact |

**Aggressive**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What you can do** | **How you can do it** |
| Calm the environment | * Allow the person to cool down * Use a calming voice |
| Listen more than talk | * Allow the other person to talk everything out * Acknowledge understanding through active listening |
| Point out the anger | * Describe the impact anger has on the situation |
| Avoid responding with aggression | * Maintain self-control |
| Acknowledge facts | * Apply logic based on facts not emotions |
| Express empathy | * Acknowledge feelings * Acknowledge a right to have emotions |

Now split the group into pairs and have each person play an aggressive or a passive person and have the recipient of the behaviours respond as discussed previously. Alternatively have one pair demonstrate for the group. Some examples to use as role plays:

* A person is responding aggressively to you as you were promoted over her/him
* A person is reluctant to put their hand up for a new project as they don’t believe they have the skills or confidence
* You make a mistake at work and your supervisor tells you off in an aggressive manner
* You are constantly apologising for what you believe are your shortcomings at work

**Activity 2: Responding assertively using ‘I’ statements**

**Introduction**

‘I’ statements are an assertive way of communicating the effect a situation or behaviour is having on you. The statement has three parts:

The behaviour that occurs “When…”

How the behaviour makes you feel “… I find …” or “… I need…”

What you would like to see happen “... so I would like/appreciate…”

“When you bark orders at me and disappear, I lose confidence in whether I have correctly understood what you want, so can we change how we communicate so that I am clear on what all the key information is?”

Examples of leader sentences.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| When I'm shouted at, I...  When I'm sworn at, I...  When I'm pushed around, I...  When I think I'm not being heard, I... | I feel unappreciated when...  I'm worried that something will go wrong if...  My concern is that...  I get anxious when... | I get scared when...  I feel hurt when...  I feel tired when… |

**Instructions**

First, ask each of the group to recall a time when they felt challenged by someone else’s behaviour. Then get them to construct/write an ‘I’ statement using the structure above.

Next, split the group into pairs and have them practise saying their ‘I’ statements to each other.

Next repeat the exercise with participants creating several more ‘I’ statements. The more comfortable they are with the construction, the easier it will be to deliver an ‘I’ statement in the moment.

Other examples of ‘I’ statements:

“When you talk to me that way, I feel that you are undermining me and don’t have confidence in my abilities, so I’d like it if you were clear with me from the outset on what needs to improve.”

“When you ask me for assistance and I say no, and you say, ‘never mind’ I feel as though you are taking it personally and think that I don’t care, and I would like to understand if that is how you feel and why.”

**Activity 3: Saying ‘no’**

**Introduction**

One of the most effective ways of asserting your rights at work and elsewhere is in the simple act of saying ‘no’. Yet it is something that many people struggle with for fear of how they will be perceived.

There are five ways of saying ‘no’

1. Directly (and politely) in response to a request “No, thank you”.
2. Empathically, where you recognise how the other person is feeling – “I can sense your frustration, but my answer is no.”
3. Reasoned, where you provide a reason for your response – “I am unable to attend as I have a prior engagement.”
4. Alternative, where you make a counteroffer – “I am unable to finish that report today. Would tomorrow by close of business be acceptable?”
5. Enquiring, where instead of an alternative coming from you, you ask the other person to nominate – “I can’t have the report to you today. When do you need it by?”

**Instructions**

Split the group into pairs and have them practise saying ‘no’ using one or more of the methods above.

Ask each participant to think of an instance where they struggled to say ‘no’ to a work colleague. They are to relay the context to their partner and have them make the request to which they will say ‘no’. Some ideas to explore:

* A request from your boss
* An aggressive request
* A passive-aggressive request
* A request where saying ‘no’ would make you the odd person out (peer pressure)

**Activity 4: Dealing with bullies**

**Introduction**

According to Safe Work Australia (2016) workplace bullying is characterised by “repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety.”

**Repeated behaviour** refers to the persistent nature of the behaviour and can involve a range of behaviours over time.

**Unreasonable behaviour** means behaviour that a reasonable person, having considered the circumstances, would see as unreasonable, including behaviour that is victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening.

**Instructions**

Ask the group – If you believe you are being bullied at work, what can you do?

Then discuss the following options:

* Make sure you're informed. Check to see if your workplace has a bullying policy and complaints procedure.
* Keep a diary. Documenting everything that happens, including what you've done to try stopping it. This can help if you make a complaint.
* Get support from someone you trust or contact support services. This includes contacting your union.
* Approach the bully. If you feel safe and confident, you can approach the person who is bullying you and tell them that their behaviour is unwanted and not acceptable. If you are unsure how to approach them, you might be able to get advice from an appointed contact person, or from a colleague or manager.
* Tell someone at your work. Your workplace will usually have a process for making a complaint and resolving disputes which might include: a warning, requiring the bully to have counselling, a mediation process, or even firing the bully if the situation continues. The person to talk to might be your supervisor/manager, a harassment contact officer, or a health and safety representative (if your work has one).
* Get information and advice. If the bullying is serious, if the situation has not changed after complaining to your manager or if there is not anyone you can safely talk to at work, you can get outside information and advice.

**Activity 5: Identifying discriminatory behaviour**

**Introduction**

Discrimination happens when there's 'adverse action', such as firing or demoting someone because of a person's characteristics like their race, religion, sex, disability, age, pregnancy and other factors.

In Australia, the US and many other countries, legislation makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate on the basis the following protected attributes listed above.

**Instructions**

Discuss each of the following and decide if the employee is being unlawfully discriminated against. Ask the group to determine what characteristic is the focus of the discrimination and what behaviour is discriminatory.

Then ask the group to volunteer instances of discrimination they have witnessed or been subjected to and ask the other participants to comment.

**Scenario 1**

Julie is employed as an account manager at an advertising firm. The manager at the firm tells all the account managers that they can attend a training course. Julie is pregnant and tells her colleagues and the manager the good news. The manager asks Julie to come to a meeting to discuss the training. At the meeting he tells her that he has changed his mind and that she can’t attend the training because she won’t get an opportunity to use it, given she will be taking maternity leave in 6 months’ time.

**Scenario 2**

Miguel has a physical disability and relies on a wheelchair. He works as a project scheduler. On his last project he made some mistakes. Miguel's manager tells him that he’ll need to do some training to develop his skills. Miguel continues to make mistakes after he has done the training. As a result, Miguel's employer changes his duties to more general administration tasks while he does more training.

**Scenario 3**

Dimitri is an experienced barista with excellent references. He applies for a vacancy at a local coffee shop. During the job interview, the manager asks him how old he is. Dimitri tells the manager he is 57 years old.

The next day the manager calls Dimitri to tell him that he didn’t get the job because the coffee shop is looking to create a particular style (‘a younger, fresher look’). They have hired a 17-year-old who is less qualified for the job.

**Scenario 4**

Lisa is 17 years old and recently applied for a job working in a bar serving alcohol. However, the state's liquor legislation doesn't allow people under 18 years to serve alcohol. Being able to legally serve alcohol is a necessary requirement of the job.

The company wrote to Lisa saying that because she was under 18 and couldn't legally serve alcohol, she didn't meet the requirements of the job and wouldn't be asked for an interview.

**Activity 6: Reasonable management action**

**Introduction**

If you are in a management role or are the recipient of management actions (which we nearly all are) then you need to understand the difference between what is reasonable or unreasonable when it comes to management actions and requests. In determining matters of bullying, regulatory and legal bodies take into account whether the actions of the manager were considered reasonable. Reasonable management action includes:

* Conducting performance management processes
* Instigating disciplinary action for misconduct
* Informing a worker about unsatisfactory work performance or inappropriate work behaviour
* Asking a worker to perform reasonable duties in keeping with their job
* Maintaining reasonable workplace goals and standards.

**Instructions**

Ask the group to discuss each of the following scenarios to decide if the actions of the manager were reasonable or not.

Then have participants raise their own instances of management action where they were unsure if the action was reasonable. Have the group provide input as a neutral third party.

**Scenario 1**

You were formally warned of misconduct by your manager after an incident in which you misused the company credit card. Your access to the card was removed. Your manager then sent an email to all team members advising of the action taken against you to act as a warning to all staff on the need to follow company rules.

**Scenario 2**

You work in a fast-paced environment where you and your team often have to respond to last minute changes. Last week you were assigned a new task by your manager. Today she announces you are no longer working on that assignment as something urgent has come up that needs your attention. You are taken aback as this is the fourth time this has happened in the last two months. You ask your manager if Penny, a fellow team member who has spare capacity, could do this new task. Your manager says that she wants your particular skills and attention to detail.

**Scenario 3**

Last year your company set a stretch budget that is linked to stretch goals for the sales team of which you are part. You haven’t been able to reach your targets for the last two quarters. You have just had your annual performance review with your manager and were told that you will not be receiving a bonus this year as your performance didn’t meet the minimum requirements. You told your manager that you thought the stretch targets were unreasonable given they were increased in a flat market. You received a bonus last year, so it is not as if you can’t achieve.