STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE...

SHERMAN TANKS:
- Give them a little time to run down.
- Don’t worry about being polite, get in any way you can.
- Get their attention, use their name, sit/stand deliberately.
- If possible, get them to sit down.
- Maintain eye contact.
- State your opinions and perceptions forcefully.
- Don’t argue or try to cut them down.
- Be ready to be friendly.

SNIPERS:
- Smoke them out.
- Provide the sniper with an alternative to direct contest.
- Get other points of view. Don’t capitulate with sniper’s view.
- Move on to solve any problems that are uncovered.
- Regular problem solving meetings can prevent sniping.
- If you are a third party to sniping, stay out of the middle, but insist it stop in front of you.

EXPLoders:
- Let them run down and regain self-control on their own.
- If they don’t, interrupt by saying or shouting a neutral phrase such as “stop!”
- Show that you take them seriously.
- If needed and possible, get a breather and get some privacy with them.

COMPLAINERS:
- Listen actively to their complaints.
- Paraphrase and confirm your perception of how they feel about it.
- Don’t agree or apologize for their allegations.
- Avoid the accusation-defense-re accusation pattern.
- State and acknowledge facts without judgement.
- Try to move to a problem solving by:
  - Asking specific, informational questions.
  - Assigning limited fact-finding tasks.
  - Asking for the complaints in writing, but be serious and supportive about it.
- If all else fails, ask the complainer: “How do you want this discussion to end?”

UNRESPONSIVES:
- Get them to open up.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Wait calmly for a response.
- Do not fill in the silence with your conversation.
- Plan enough time for you to wait with composure.
- Get agreement/state clearly how much time is set aside for your discussion.
- If no response, comment on what’s happening. End your comment with an open-ended question.
- If still unresponsive:
  - Avoid a polite ending.
  - End the meeting yourself and set up another one.
  - At length, inform them what you must and will do, since a discussion has not occurred.
SUPER-AGREEABLES:
- Uncover the underlying facts and issues that prevent them from taking action.
- Tell them directly that you value them as people.
- Ask them what might interfere with your good relationship.
- Ask them to talk about anything that is not as good as it could be.
- Be ready to negotiate if open conflict is in the wind.
- Listen for hidden messages in humor, quips or teasing.

NEGATIVISTS:
- Don’t get dragged down.
- Make optimistic but realistic statements about past successes in solving similar problems.
- Don’t try to argue them out of their pessimism.
- Don’t offer solutions yourself until the problem has been thoroughly discussed.
- When solutions are discussed, raise negative points yourself.
- See doomsayings as potential problems to be overcome.
- Be ready to take action on your own; announce your plans.
- Also, beware of eliciting negativistic responses from highly analytical people; don’t ask them to act before they feel ready.

BULLDOZERS:
- Prepare thoroughly. Review pertinent facts/materials.
- Paraphrase the bulldozer’s proposals.
- Avoid dogmatic statements.
- Use questions to raise problems.
- Convey your appreciation for their knowledge.
- Take the time to review their proposals.

BALLOONS:
- State correct facts or alternative opinions descriptively.
- Let them save face.
- Be ready to fill in conversation gaps.
- When possible, deal with the balloon alone.

INDECISIVE (STALLERS):
- Make it easy for them to tell you about conflicts or reservations that prevent the decision.
- Listen for indirect words, hesitations and omissions that may provide clues to problem areas.
- Help them solve their problems with the decision.
- Help them to examine the facts.
- Give support after the decision has been made.
- If they become angry or withdraw, remove them from the decision situation.

SOURCE: “COPING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE” BY ROBERT M. BRAMSON, PH.D.

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