

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

CANTERBURY EDUCATION SERVICES

CHRISTCHURCH CONFERENCE

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“Being different is a revolving door in your life where secure people enter and insecure exit.”

Shannon L. Alder

What are some of the Differences in People with whom we associate?

1. Generational Groups

The Baby Boomers

The Trend Setters

1943 – 1965

70's – major change	Inspired by the Consciousness Raising Movement
Rise in divorce rates – 50%	^{1st} generation to see widespread use of the contraceptive pill
Increase in women at work	^{1st} generation to be weaned on television
Claimed the world by right of inheritance	Raised in an era of high national wealth and expansion
Are fiercely competitive having had to fight	Led the trends in the past re housing, schools etc and still lead trends in leisure and self improvement
Believe every other generational group should follow their lead	As young adults, saw a redefining of gender roles and family groups

Generation X

1964 – 1981

Relationships matter the most	Will do anything to be loved
Racially diverse	Individualism is valued
Wary of commitment	Live with change and embrace it
Work so that they have a life	Adrenaline junkies – extreme
Spiritual seekers	Stressed out & over organised
No boundaries	Embrace technology
Love stories	Part of the global youth culture
Media savvy	

The Generation Y

Millennials

1982 – 2000

Spoilt, materialistic & elf absorbed	Money hungry
Celebrity focused	Image conscious
Driven to own whatever marketers tell them is cool	Flighty & promiscuous
Many start careers with a loan & accept debt as essential	Will travel to advance their careers
Reluctant to strive for the kiwi dream of owning a 1st home in an overpriced market	May be responsible with the increasing burden of ageing parents and adult children who want or need to live with them
Pleasure seekers & live for today	Have little opinion on social & political issues
Buy things to make them feel better	Spends any money left at the end of the pay period
Make minimal payments on credit cards	Emphasis on hedonic consumption

Knowledge Workers

This is a sub group who are tertiary educated professionals characterised as aligned with their “craft” who

Look for high profile employment early in their careers	Have expectations of combining work and leisure and wanting variety and challenge
Many will reinvent their careers several times during their working life	Like to be mobile working between employers relatively frequently

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2. Learning/Communication Differences:

- **Auditory** ‘I hear what you are saying’
- **Visual** ‘I see what you mean’
- **Kinaesthetic** ‘Let me try it in my way’

3. Team Roles Differences (Meredith Belbin) and Working Styles

<i>Role Name</i>	<i>Strengths and Working Styles</i>	<i>Personality</i>
Coordinator (CO)	able to get others working to a shared aim; confident, mature - (originally called 'Chairman' by Belbin)	Extravert
Shaper (SH)	motivated, energetic, achievement-driven, assertive, competitive	Extravert
Plant (PL)	innovative, inventive, creative, original, imaginative, unorthodox, problem-solving	Extravert
Monitor-Evaluator (ME)	serious, prudent, critical thinker, analytical	
Implementer (IMP)	systematic, common sense, loyal, structured, reliable, dependable, practicable, efficient (originally called 'Company Workers')	
Resource Investigator (RI)	quick, good communicator, networker, outgoing, affable, seeks and finds options, negotiator	Extravert
Team Worker (TW)	supportive, sociable, flexible, adaptable, perceptive, listener, calming influence, mediator	
Completer-Finisher (CF)	attention to detail, accurate, high standards, quality orientated, delivers to schedule and specification	
Specialist (SP)	technical expert, highly focused capability and knowledge, driven by professional standards and dedication to personal subject area	

4. Behavioural Differences (Dave Mather)

John G. Geier, Ph.D., and Dorothy E. Downey, M.S., were the creators of the original Personal Profile System test, an approach to understanding a person's behaviour and personality type.

Their four behavioural categories, identified by the letters D, I, S, and C, are often called DISC.

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***“Strength lies in differences
not in similarities.”***

Stephen Covey

Below are styles known as the pure styles:

Category	Colour	Type	Description
D	Red	Action-oriented	These individuals are doers rather than talkers or thinkers. They relish the new and different and love to lead the field.
I	Amber	Social-minded	These individuals love to talk and value enthusiasm. They like to have the “latest” in order to create a positive impression.
S	Blue	Thinkers	These people are individualistic. They see themselves as unique individuals and do not like to be compared to others.
C	Green	Counters	These individuals love to count and measure things. They mistrust people’s judgement and appear sceptical of change.

There is a criticism of this approach of putting people into in boxes.

Geier would state: “I don’t put people in boxes. I find them there.”

If we truly want to connect with others, we can do so based on responding to others’ behavioural clues.

5. Measuring Others against Your High Standards/Skills/Competencies.

This is prevalent in high achievers who then measure others against their skills levels. The acceptable standards of the SOP or the organisation should be the basis for the measurement.

6. Measuring the Newcomer Against his/her Predecessor.

It is unwise to hire a ‘clone’ therefore comparing the replacement person who may well have different tasks within the Role (Job) Description with the predecessor is not conducive in welcoming the newcomer into the team. By not listening to the ideas, new techniques of ‘fresh eyes’ etc. can result in a detrimental effect on the team’s ability to learn from others to improve productivity.

7. Is your Personality a Contributing factor in Difficult Situations where other people are blamed for being difficult?

Complete the following exercise to see if this is the case.

KNOW YOUR PERSONALITY TYPE

Researchers Rosenman and Friedman (1975) observed that Type “A” people were more likely to suffer heart attacks than Type “B” people even if the work and living conditions were identical. Type “A”: were more likely to act aggressively to people and situations and therefore more likely to suffer from stress and conflict will result ultimately.

Do you incline towards any of the following?

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*Success is moving from one failure
to another
with no loss of enthusiasm*

Sir Winston Churchill

Personality “A”

Hard driving	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tenseness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time Conscious	<input type="checkbox"/>	Impatience	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restlessness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hyper- alertness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Explosiveness of speech	<input type="checkbox"/>	Likes to do several things at once	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does everything quickly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Aggressive, pushy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Striving for achievement	<input type="checkbox"/>	Oppressiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inability to relax	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ambitious	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extremely competitive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assertive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a strong forceful personality	<input type="checkbox"/>	Feeling tense under the challenge of responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evident work overload	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speaks rapidly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to organise	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires public recognition for what he/she has achieved	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anxious for promotion at work or for social advancement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is impatient by delay	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is always on time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aims for being rather than having work and spare time planned	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is very conscious of time – thrives on having to meet deadlines	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a strong, forceful personality	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has taut facial muscles and/or clenches fists	<input type="checkbox"/>
Walks and moves quickly	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Feels restless when compelled to be inactive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is easily angered by people and events	<input type="checkbox"/>

Personality “B”

Realistic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prioritises	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is able to delegate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not competitive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has a sense of humour	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does not want public recognition	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has an easy – going, relaxed manner	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does things slowly and methodically	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is satisfied with one’s social position	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is relatively content with present work conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Can enjoy periods of idleness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speaks slowly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefers to do one thing at a time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is slow to be aroused by anger	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is frequently late	<input type="checkbox"/>
Walks, moves and eats in a leisurely way	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has relaxed facial muscles, does not clench fists	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is patient – not easily upset by delay	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is not time conscious – tends to ignore deadlines	<input type="checkbox"/>

These lists are a guide, so do not be too concerned if you have a few of Type “A” characteristics – it probably means you achieve things.

If more than half of them apply, it might be time to see what you can do to change some of your reactions to life and to people– as these can have a significant effect on those so called ‘difficult’ people.

Executives Under Pressure: Marshal J. & Cooper C. L.

Coping with Stress at Work: Marshal J. & Cooper C. L.

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

“All things are difficult before they are easy”

Thomas Fuller

If you classify someone as difficult rather than different often they are working from the negative side of their personality rather than the conscious desire to be difficult. This person is often unaware that this part of their personality is on show. They do not realise the affect this has on their dealings with others. They do not realise how harmful this can be to their own lives both professionally and privately.

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Many workplaces today require employees to work more with fewer staff and less resources; resulting often in an increase in pressure therefore individual stress, personality clashes (unresolved issues) and people taking feedback on their work in a personal way.

Team leaders, managers etc. need to understand the underlying emotional vulnerability of some employees and the need for many of recognition and the importance of self worth. Having understood this, one discovers the fundamental elements of building trust, activating motivation and producing productive work relations.

There also needs to be considered the three (3) underlying reasons for difficult situations in the work place:

POT:

- People
- Organisational and
- Technical

***If you do not like something:
change it.
If you cannot change it
then change the
way you think about it'***

Mary Engelbreit

All communication consists of reaction and counter reaction. By changing your reactions both inwardly and outwardly you can make difficult people counter react in a different way even if only on a temporary basis. This may not result in totally eliminating any problems however it will diffuse most situations and therefore make them easier to deal with.

The REBELS Model for Dealing with Difficult Situations and Clients

R = Recognise that there is a problem or a potential problem.

- the problem is clearly recognised early in the consultation
- be aware of one's own responses to challenging clients
- focus on the issue not the personality of the client which may be prejudiced or bias (recognise these)
- explore the issue
- use acknowledgement statements e.g. *'I can see that you're really angry'*, or *'I can see you have a long list there'* or *'you don't appear to be too keen on that idea'*, *'I understand that this is a dilemma for you'*
- it is easier to deal with the problem when it is stated and 'out there'
- appreciate that solving problems takes time so do not give the impression that you are rushing as this can be misinterpreted as the client not being important to you

E – Express Empathy is the crucial part of the approach to challenging clients.

- recognise your own reaction to clients with whom you feel less able to empathise or they are the ones who really push your buttons' e.g. a client who is 'always' demanding and wants an impossible delivery deadline
- with empathy you can begin to see the situation more clearly from the client's perspective
- have conscious awareness of your own non-verbal behaviour i.e. body language to use as much verbal reflection of feeling as possible;

- the stronger the emotion the more important it is to reflect this back to the client e.g. where a client feels no one understands them or gives them what they want, this can be reflected back by stating :

‘so you really feel that no one hears you or gives you what you need’

‘so what you are saying is that you feel that we are not.....’

- wait for a response and reflect back the next feeling
- repeat this process several times and the client will begin to feel that you really understand them
- summarise the client’s point of view; very helpful at the end of this stage; use phrases such as *‘so let’s summarise what we have understood from our discussion/conversation’*

B – Establish Clear Boundaries; both professional and interpersonal boundaries with assertiveness. These are important for safe, ethical and professional practices.

- state that, legally or policy wise, as a representative of your organisation, you cannot undertake a particular action
- the time or supply of parts, merchandise, finished product is not possible due to commitments to other clients
- allow the client to see that you will not be persuaded into doing something you consider inappropriate
- if your boundaries are being challenged, you may be able to use phrases such as *‘we have a company policy...’*, or *‘legally I cannot sign off this brief/job until I have enough information /parts etc....’*, *‘I have promised another client this deadline date so I am unable to meet the deadline you require.....’*
- stay calm, and re-state our boundaries
- if tension escalates, do not hesitate to ask for assistance

E – Emphasise the client’s best interest by making them the centre of the interaction

- empathy assists in the client not arguing that you are not doing anything or offering them any solutions
- statements that could be helpful are *‘it’s really important that we take the time to sort this out properly for you...’* or *‘we need to make sure we get the best results for you’*

L –Language should be inclusive; be aware of how your language influences the consultation, particularly when you feel defensive or under threat during an interaction.

- Do not alienate clients by using technical (jargon) language or language which can prevent a connection between the parties i.e. responses beginning with ‘why?’ and ‘but’ e.g. *‘why do you want me to...?’* or *‘but I can’t do that...’* are divisive in this context.
- use inclusive language, e.g. ‘we’, ‘both.....and’ is useful e.g. *‘we need to find a way’* *‘so both observations you have made are true, you will need....., and I cannot authorise ...’* could be possible phrases to use
- give eye contact
- do not use confrontational or judgemental language or body language
- try and sit or stand in a relaxed manner
- keep voice at a low pitch but audible; do not raise voice no matter how difficult the person may be
- try and maintain an air of calmness in your manner and language
- make requests not ultimatums

S –Solutions should be the primary focus

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- move from the problem and the client's needs to what solutions could be considered
- hopefully you have obtained a reasonable rapport by being empathic and illustrating to the client that you have had their best interest as a priority
- so you move from their needs to being able to look at possible solutions, e.g. 'unfortunately I am unable to carry out your request in the timeframe you have requested however this is what I can do for you.....'
- ask the client for a solution which could be considered in order to generate a way forward
- be prepared for a solution which you cannot accomplish so you need to re-establish the boundaries outlined earlier in the conversation
- be prepared to negotiate if you are able to negotiate
- listen carefully to views, opinions and possible solutions from the other party particularly if they promote one that you did not consider now or in the past
- do not compete with the client to leave the perception that you are in the more powerful position and they are powerless
- try to collaborate where you can resulting in a win/win outcome i.e. satisfying their needs and yours

"What is the difference between an obstacle and an opportunity?

Our attitude towards it.

***Every opportunity has a difficulty
and every difficulty has an opportunity."***

J. Sidlow Baxter

Using the 'I' Language

Know what you want and what your rights are.

Sort out what bothers you about a particular situation e.g. the timing, the short notice, the interruption, the content of the conversation.

The Principles of the 5 Step Pattern:

1.	When.....	Describe the behaviour	Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>interrupt me ...</i> • <i>when your don't listen.....</i>
2.	The consequences . . .	A description of the effects	Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>and then make the same mistake again.....</i> • <i>it's hard for me to gather my thoughts.....</i> • <i>it is as though it doesn't matter what the other person has to say</i>
3.	I feel	A description of the speaker's feelings	Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I feel angry...</i> • <i>I'm frustrated ...</i> • <i>I get embarrassed.</i>
		Pause and wait for any reply as to a reason, explanation, possibly an apology	
4.	I need you to	A description of how you'd like the behaviour to be changed	Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I want you to knock first...</i> • <i>I need you to give me more notice</i> • <i>I need you to double check.....</i>
5.	Agreement.....	Asking for agreement	Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you think? ...</i> • <i>Do you agree? ...</i> • <i>How can we set this up so that it won't happen again?</i>

Consider Partial Limits e.g.

- "I don't mind staying behind but I need more notice"
- "I'm happy to answer your questions, but please don't interrupt my conversations."

If you need to increase the intensity of your message:

- make your refusal definite
- don't offer explanations or excuses
- answer any questions only briefly and restate your refusal

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Summary

1. **Stay Calm.**
2. **Consider what the angry person needs.**
3. **Soften the anger with an apology when you are in the wrong or have made a mistake.**
4. **Ask lots of questions.**
5. **Listen actively.**
6. **If the customer's voice rises in tone; soften yours.**
7. **Avoid pre-judging.**
8. **Try and prevent difficult situations in the future by changing methodology.**
9. **Act professionally; adult to adult not child to adult or in your opinion 'child'.**
10. **Aim for a win-win; what does the customer need?**
11. **Remember one size does not fit all.**

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