
What is Your Problem? (Maybe it's You)

by **Lynne Eisaguirre**

One summer Saturday night, I was sitting in a café called Wonderview at the top of Coal Creek Canyon, just north of where I live in Golden, Colorado.

Suddenly, a two hundred fifty-pound guy, in a Batman get-up, leaped from behind the trailer across the road! He darted in and out of the pines and then evaporated into the cabin behind the trailers, intent upon some secret rescue mission.

“Batman!” I exclaimed.

A few diners glanced up and then went back to slurping margaritas and crunching on chips and salsa.

“Oh yeah,” my friend muttered. “I’ve seen him before. He comes out on Saturday nights to entertain people.”

“But who is he? What’s he doing here?”

“Who knows?” My friend, who lives in the canyon and is unfazed by its many eccentric characters, shrugged.

What, exactly, does it mean to be difficult?

While longtime canyon residents shrug off the antics of this would-be Batman as Saturday night entertainment I was left to ponder how this diverse

crowd would handle his eccentric behavior if they knew him in another context?

Would the residents of Denver's tonier suburbs tolerate Batman leaping about every Saturday night in their neighborhood? Would it be difficult if he were a part of their family? A neighbor? An employee? A colleague? Is the would-be Batman difficult or just different?

Who, and what, we decide is difficult depends totally on context and our own world view. Recently, I was talking to one of my colleagues, Bill, about marriage and its many difficulties. "Marriage is hard," he agrees, "Jean has been driving me crazy."

"What does she do?" I asked.

"She's always losing her keys; it drives me nuts!"

Compared to other marital woes, griping about misplaced keys seemed just petty, but to him, it's crazy making. When I think about the fact that Bill is compulsively organized, I could see that waiting around while Jean searches endlessly for the elusive keys would be beyond maddening.

How about you? Can you tolerate missing keys? Do you sweat the small stuff, or do you understand that really, it's almost all small stuff? That's not to say that people don't want excellence. Of course, you want to be on a high performing team. Of course, you want to be surrounded by brilliant, competent people who are also kind and charming and know exactly what to say and when not to speak at all.

But, we are on planet Earth so *stuff happens*. Even if you're surrounded by high-flying extraordinary colleagues, they may drive you nuts! The truth is, that may be more a matter of your own issues—not theirs.

In most workplaces, there *are* truly difficult people who drive everyone batty. Even the Dalai Lama, when pressed on the issue of whether force should be used around the globe responded in a recent interview that yes, sometimes you do have to use force because there are “rascals afoot in the world.” However, whether we see rascals or terrorists may be a matter of our perspective or our place in life.

How do YOU Define Difficult?

How do you decide who is truly difficult? A good test is this: does it have an impact on your individual or team performance? If not, it's eccentric, “rascally” behavior and you need to manage your own attitude. It's not a truly difficult person who needs to be monitored and managed.

If the person is keeping you from doing your best work, it may be because of what you're doing. Ask yourself if it is because you're engaged in “taking their inventory, not yours” as they say in twelve step groups. Are you focusing on their faults, instead of spending your energy more productively by improving your own behavior?