
What to Do When a Co-Worker Drives You Crazy

by Lynne Eisaguirre

Maybe the guy in the cubicle next to you smacks his gum all day, or maybe he's a loud-talker. Could be your nemesis at work is constantly complaining and spewing negative comments. Whoever is bothering you at work can have the power to turn a good day into a bad one. Reclaim your sanity and find your workplace Zen with some tips on how to cope.

Is it them or you?

How do you decide who is truly difficult? A good test is this: Does the person's behavior have an impact on your individual or team performance? If not, it's eccentric, "rascally" behavior and you need to manage your own attitude. If the person is keeping you from doing your best work, it may be because of what you're doing.

Next figure out why this person drives you crazy. Is it something that "triggers" you or reminds you of your own issues?

It's important that you don't impose your own triggers or issues on your co-workers. You have no right to darken the doorsteps of colleagues with your own issues. If you realize you're struggling with an issue, take action and get help.

Are they doing it just to piss you off?

When someone at work drives you batty, it helps to consider whether there are generational, cultural or ethnic differences that may be contributing to the clashes. The workplace has become increasingly diverse which sometimes makes good communication difficult, but even more important.

I am also of the opinion that people are hardwired with certain personality characteristics, some of which can be extremely annoying. Understanding how other people's brains might be hardwired can help us cope with their seemingly bizarre (to us) behavior.

And sometimes there's an underlying medical reason for a coworker's bad behavior. The reality is that they may be suffering from depression or undergoing medical treatment that is affecting them. Consider the fact that the difficult person in your work group may not just be difficult, but very ill.

When to shrug it off

So how do you deal? Sometimes, it's worthwhile to revert to that time-honored teen behavior: the shrug. Pretend that you're a self-absorbed adolescent and you'll find that you can simply shrug and look the other way. It'll probably even feel great!

If the shrug doesn't work and the person is really keeping you from doing your best work and you've done your best to ignore him or her it's time to get serious about a solution.

Confronting your co-worker

If you've decided you have to do something about a co-worker's annoying behavior, prepare for your conversation and have it face-to-face, and in private. If you can't speak in person then pick up the phone and have a real-time conversation, don't just leave voice mails. And never, never, address the issue via e-mail. Once relationships tank, e-mailing only escalates the feud.

Before you meet, figure out exactly what your complaints are. When speaking to your coworker, be as specific as possible. Instead of asking them to change an attitude, spell out exactly what the annoying behavior is and what you'd like them to do to remedy the situation.

Tackle one topic at a time and focus on eliminating the biggest problem or the easiest to solve. Then, after you've stated your case, recap what you've spoken about, what you expect the other person to do and then thank them for their cooperation and tell them you look forward to a better working relationship. Then what? Leave. Don't hover or nag, just go away.