

# How To Deal with Difficult Coworkers



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Just like life outside the workplace, you won't get along with everyone you meet on the job. However, unlike real life, you can't choose to spend all your time with the people you like; eventually, you will encounter difficult coworkers, and learning how to deal with them while maintaining professional civility could mean the difference between a happy work environment and an unbearable one.

**Circumvent:** Try to figure out when you tend to see your troublesome office mate, and change your routine accordingly. Can you take a route ... that doesn't take you past the loud talker's cubicle? If you meet the same irritating gossip in the kitchen at 10 o'clock, try taking your morning coffee break 15 minutes earlier or later. Simply avoiding an unpleasant situation can significantly improve your work day.

**Make a plan:** Having an ideal solution planned before you say anything, or at least some reasons why your neighbor's behavior needs to change, can help you speak reasonably and rationally, turning a potentially ugly confrontation into a polite request. Pare down your big speech into a few salient points--you don't want to start a huge argument over someone's refusal to reload the printer paper.

**Ask politely:** If it's your cubicle neighbor's inconsiderate workplace habits that are making you nuts, you're going to have to say something. Make lots of "I" statements, like "I have trouble focusing on my work with so much ambient office noise. Would it be possible for you to make personal calls in a more private place?" Don't be afraid to sound selfish; it's far better to come across as a little demanding than put your coworker on the defensive.

**Take it to the top:** After a couple of tries, if your coworker isn't taking the hint, you might want to speak to someone in the Human Resources department about the problem. At this point, human resources is your best bet; employees there are trained to aid in conflict resolution, and it's in everyone's best interests that both you and your irritating coworker get along.