

Why are they so difficult?

By Nancy Slessenger

Difficult people are 'difficult' because they don't behave in the way we expect them to or want them to.

Very often they are responding in a way that is different to others we have dealt with in the past. So we don't know how to get them to behave in the way we want them to.

When you run up against a 'difficult person' the first thing to do is to identify what you need to achieve.

Stop thinking about the person and focus on what it is you really need.

Next, think about things from their perspective. This is always a beneficial thing to do, though not always easy.

You need to ask yourself these questions:

- What would it be like to be this person, right now?
- How are they feeling?
- What is important to them?
- What do they know?
- What are they frightened of?
- What is worrying them?
- How do they see the world?
- What do they need?

I was stuck at Miami Airport when the British Airways flights were all cancelled a few years back. Mine was one of the first flights to be cancelled. We had been waiting to check in for three hours. No one had told us what was happening. I had called Charlie in the UK to find out.

When we were nearly at the front of the queue I overheard (you couldn't help but overhear) a group of Americans getting very angry with the man at the desk. I turned to the others in the queue I'd been chatting with and suggested that, though we were hot, tired and angry, this approach was unlikely to be successful.

When we got to the front of the queue I immediately said how sorry I was that the man had clearly had to stay on late to deal with this situation. 'You were probably supposed to finish your shift ages ago' I said.

He immediately smiled and said that yes, he was, but it was his job to ensure that the passengers were all looked after.

Immediately we all felt better as we saw him relax and he said he'd do his best to get us on other flights. I'm sure he did his best for the other angry passengers too, but I'm equally sure we avoided any unnecessary stress and tension. Possibly we got better flights and better hotel rooms as a result.

Yes, it did demand a bit of effort on our part initially. But after that, it was much better. Later, he came personally to our hotel to check everything was OK.

Understanding the needs of others is crucial in our dealings with them, especially where there are problems. Remember, other people are different to you. Different things are important to them and they have a different understanding of the world.

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