

## Basic, All-Purpose Skills to Increase Collaboration with Difficult People

- A. Recognize and break the dysfunctional pattern – Do Something Different!
- B. Appreciate criticism/attacks
  - 1. Don't be defensive
  - 2. Don't counterattack
  - 3. Hold your ground
- C. Look for ways of reducing difference between you and Difficult Person (DP)
  - 1. Make sure DP feels seen, heard, understood – Active Listening Skills
    - a. Always first listen (and show listening – tracking behavior, hmm-mmm, repeating words)
    - b. Then understand (and show understanding – paraphrasing, clarifying, summarizing; confirming – “Do you feel I hear you? Is there anything else?”)
  - 2. Find common ground (blending)
  - 3. Identify positive intent in DP and in yourself
    - a. In DP: “I see you're trying to get the task done, trying to get the task right, trying to build teamwork; I appreciate your efforts”
    - b. In yourself: “I want to make sure we make the deadline; I want us to feel we're all on the same team”
  - 5. Using softening rather than confrontive language
    - a. Collaborate rather than issue ultimatums: “Can we work together to solve this problem?” vs. “I can't work with you”
    - b. Reduce intensity rather than escalate: “Let's sit down”
    - c. Avoid yes-but
    - d. Acknowledge DP's feelings
    - e. Apologize without accepting blame (“I'm sorry you feel that way”; “I'm sorry this situation has been so upsetting for you”)
    - f. Use I statements
    - g. Avoid blame
    - h. Don't focus on what's fair or about being right
    - i. Compliment DP
  - 6. Pay attention to nonverbal behavior (yours and DP's)
- D. Figure out what the DP needs and find a way to deliver it:
  - 1. Usually respect, recognition, approval, attention, inclusion
  - 2. Figure out what's important to the person and acknowledge – “If I understand you correctly, this is why this is important to you...”
- E. Be solution-oriented
  - 1. Define the (main) problem, not the person
    - a. Who does what to whom, and how is this behavior a problem?
  - 2. Ask for ideas about how to resolve disagreement
  - 3. State your position clearly but nondefensively: “Could I share my perspective?”
  - 4. Be willing to negotiate
  - 5. Look for collaborative answers that include both parties' main need