

How to deal with difficult coworkers

Everyone has to deal with difficult coworkers — even your favorite team members can sometimes be a bit hard to work with. While you might not always be able to take a difficult coworker and make them your best friend, you *can* take actions to improve the relationship or at least to make the relationship more tolerable.

In this BusinessManagementDaily.com article, we cover:

- Common types of difficult coworkers and how to deal with them
- General strategies for dealing with a difficult coworker

Assess the situation

So you're annoyed by a coworker for whatever reason. The first step in solving the problem is to define the situation.

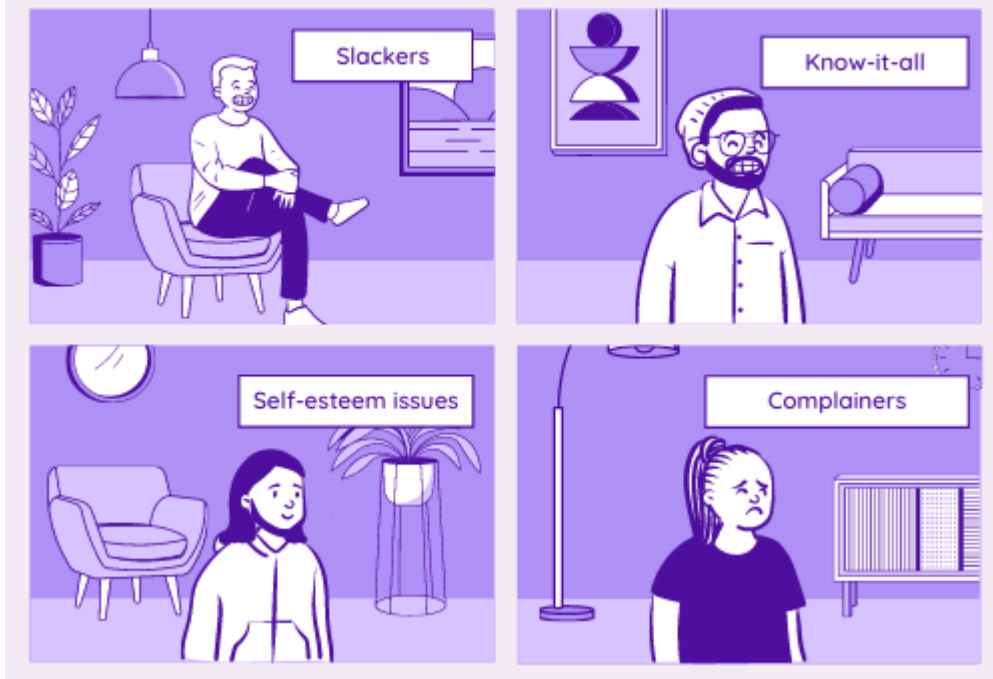
Typically, there is a reason why they're difficult to work with. Make an effort to understand what the cause of your challenges with them is. From there, try to understand why this person acts that way, and be sympathetic if there is an actual reason. While you may not agree with them, you won't get far if you can't at least understand where they may be coming from.

Know the types of difficult coworkers

There are many different types of difficult coworkers, and if you can define the type of difficult worker, you are one step closer to finding a solution to the problem. Forbes magazine also breaks down the different types of difficult coworkers in an effort to define the issue.

Here's our take:

Difficult Coworkers in the Workplace



Slackers

There are lazy people in almost every workplace, and the people who work hard are constantly picking up the slack. Slackers are always wanting to take time off, or do the bare minimum on a job, and creates productivity holes for other coworkers.

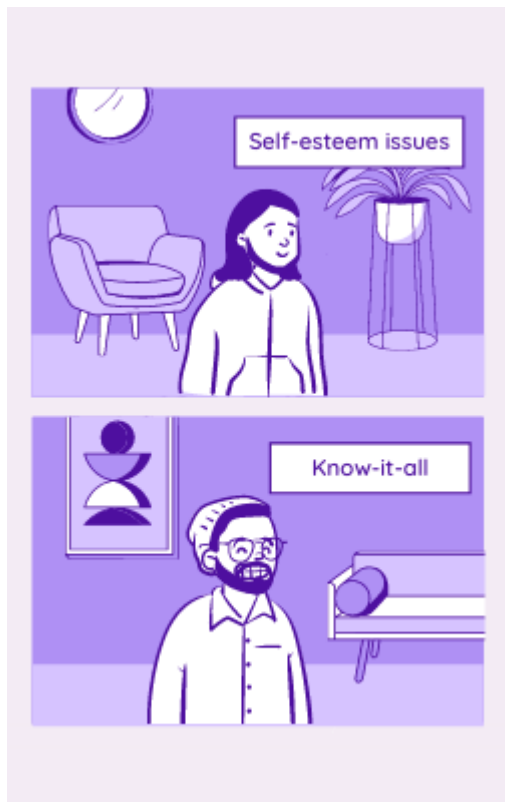
Now, it's important to recognize the difference between *slacking* and having a *work-life balance*. A slacker is an employee who doesn't put in the effort and isn't available. Simply using your vacation time and, for example, being mostly unavailable after close of business, may just be signs of a healthy work-life balance, not a slacker.

How to handle slackers at work?

Slackers need to be micromanaged. Management needs to be adamant with these workers and, if they're missing targets, put them on a performance improvement plan. One way or another, they need a wake-up call. However, as a coworker, you may not be in a position to do this. If you're not getting the work you need from someone, or a coworker isn't pulling their weight, then speak with your manager. They should be able to move the problem through the proper channels.

Self-esteem issues

Personal issues aren't supposed to bleed over into the work environment, but they almost always do. It's sad when a person doesn't value themselves, and it's easy to get down on yourself in this demanding world. Low self-esteem can cause a worker to be less productive, irritable, and too passive when they need to put their foot down. Coworkers should help lift each other up out of the holes of depression as much as possible.



What to do with a coworker who has low self-esteem?

The best way to deal with people who have self-esteem issues is to build them up. Give compliments, recognize their contributions, and make them feel as if they matter. It's also important to remember that shallow compliments can feel patronizing. Don't simply say "you're doing a great job" — explain how they're doing a great job. Making it specific makes it appear genuine.

In extreme cases, human resources may need to be involved with self-esteem and depression issues. For example, if the employee makes comments that allude to self-harm, then human resources should be brought in immediately so they can be given professional help.

Know-it-all

There's always that team member that doesn't let others get a word in, which ultimately stirs up the tension in the workplace. While an intelligent coworker can be a valuable asset, the know-it-all can be one of the most difficult type of employees to work with.

How to interact with a know-it-all coworker?

The best thing to do with someone who doesn't let other people get a word in is to not let them steal the spotlight. Stand your ground and speak up when you feel confident that you know something.

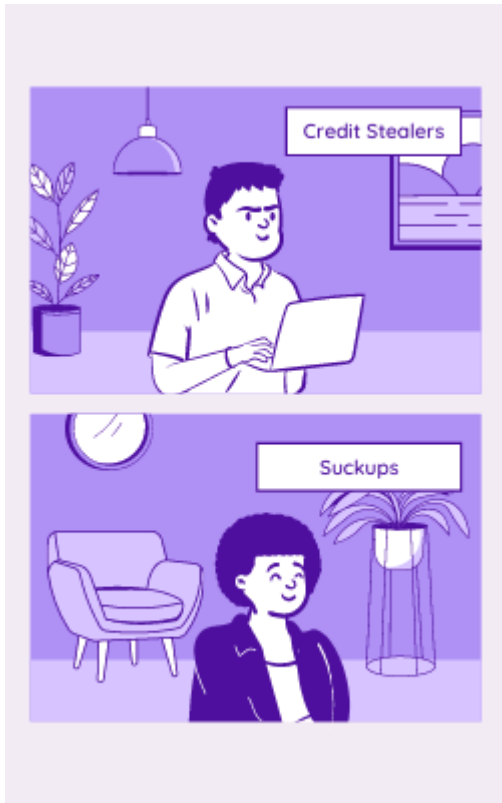
Complainers

A little venting can be helpful and cathartic, but nobody likes someone who constantly brings the mood down. Employees who constantly complain kill morale, and make everyone else want to go home too.

How to tolerate complaining employees?

Whether you're the manager or employee, being positive with a complaining employee is the natural first step. Try to focus on the positives. If it continues to become an issue, there's nothing wrong with bringing it to their

attention. Simply saying "I understand the situation isn't ideal, but I'd rather focus on the positives and getting things done" will express that you're not interested in engaging in endless complaining while still being polite.



Credit stealers

Some coworkers simply can't find fulfillment in their own work and feel like they need to take credit for other people's work. This can include a coworker that oversells their contributions, a manager that doesn't give their subordinates enough credit for their work, or someone that talks down your contributions, or even blatantly tries to take credit for your actions.

How to cooperate with credit stealers

By all means, you've got to be assertive about receiving credit for your own work. When a fellow coworker is stealing your work, that's when you must step in, and let the boss know that you are the one pulling the real weight. While it may be uncomfortable, it's important to stand up for yourself and get the recognition you deserve.

Suckups

Possibly the most annoying coworker is the one of is constantly trying to get the boss's attention by giving them compliment after compliment. It gets even worse when the boss doesn't even realize what's going on and commends the person's actions.

Dealing with suckups

While this behavior can be annoying, it often isn't the most egregious or detrimental of actions. In most cases, it can simply be ignored. If you feel this coworker's actions are earning them too much attention and you're falling to the wayside, consider trying to be more outspoken and bring your contributions up to your boss.

General tips for dealing with difficult coworkers

Avoid gossiping and put-downs

You are better off keeping your mouth shut when it comes to talking about other employees. When looking at it from a manager's perspective, office gossip hurts productivity and morale, and it also creates [mistrust](#) between employees, according to Sandler Training. Engaging in gossip is likely to make any existing problems worse.

Think before speaking

Sure, you might put a little thought into what you say in front of the whole staff at a meeting, but you should also be extremely careful about the words you use in the workplace. Words can slip out, and when they do it has the potential to cause immense problems.

Normally, you don't need to point out the personal flaws of your coworkers, especially not in the heat of the moment. Yes, performance issues can be kindly pointed out, but be sure to speak with purpose, and keep it positive.



Evaluate your own behavior

Sometimes it's good to take a step back and evaluate your behavior towards a situation. You should always be critical of yourself. If an employee is difficult to work with, it may be possible that actions you're taking are contributing to the problem. Searching for self-improvement is a top-notch quality to have in the workplace. Management and higher-ups always notice employees who are constantly improving upon themselves.

Ask for advice

Are difficult people making you re-think your career choices? Don't be afraid to ask people for advice. If you're having a difficult time, you might need someone else's perspective. This could be a coworker, manager, or even someone outside of the organization. Of course, if a problem is escalating to the point of being toxic, then you should be in touch with your manager and/or HR.

Talk to your human resources department

When all else fails, you've got to talk to your human resources department (if there is one) about your issues with another coworker or boss. This especially applies with sexually, physically, or verbally abusive coworkers who must be weeded out of the workplace immediately to keep other employees safe.

Form positive relationships

Positivity is probably the best way to deal with difficult coworkers. You will be surprised to learn how fast a relationship with a coworker can turn around by simply shouting out their name with a friendly 'good morning!'. Building a positive relationship gives you something to fall back on when difficult situations do come up.

Isolate yourself from difficult coworkers

So maybe you've tried all of our previous advice, and you still can't manage to stomach a specific coworker. *That's okay.* You have control over your life, so, by all means, you should separate yourself from people who take your peace away from you. While it may not be possible to completely separate yourself, especially if it's someone working in your department, you can limit unnecessary interactions. Additionally, you can also speak

with your manager and/or HR to see if you and the coworker can be separated in a more formal way.