

# How to deal with difficult coworkers

Everyone has to deal with difficult coworkers — even your favorite team members can sometimes be hard to work with. You might not always be able to turn a difficult coworker into your best friend. However, you *can* take action to improve the relationship and make the relationship more manageable.

Employees that feel comfortable generally perform better. That's why when a difficult colleague is negatively impacting the work environment, it's necessary to address it. However, how to deal with these situations can be challenging to determine. What might feel the most cathartic—passive aggression, complaining to others, or lashing out—usually isn't the most effective. So how do you approach dealing with difficult people in a productive way?

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

The first step in solving the problem is to define the situation. When possible, it's best to first remove yourself from the situation. Then, take time to properly assess the situation.

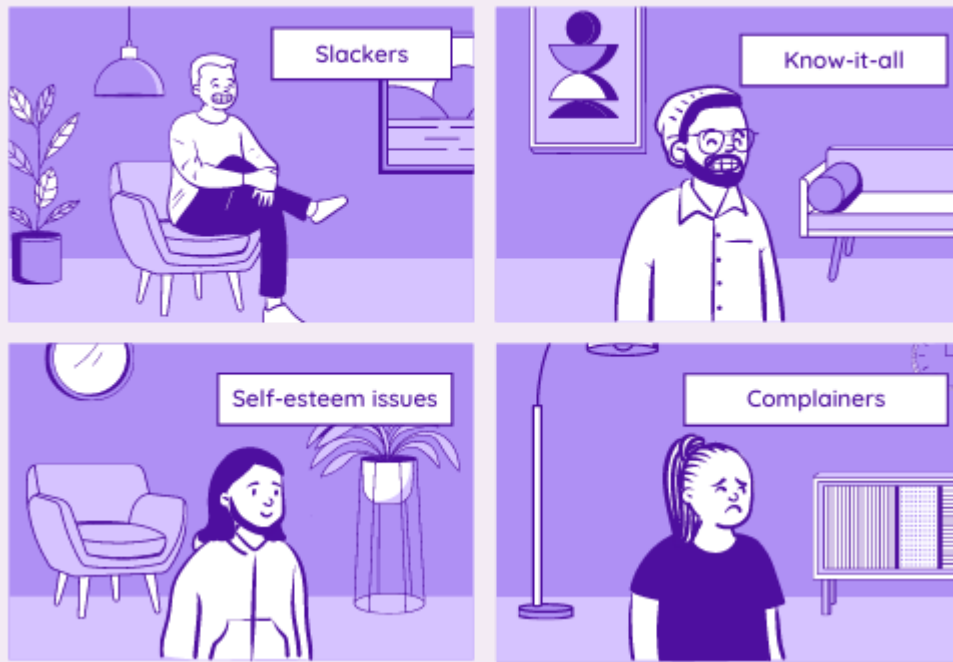
Typically, there is a reason why you find them difficult to work with. Make an effort to understand what the cause of your challenges with them is. From there, try to understand why this person acts that way. Be prepared to be sympathetic to their point of view. While you may not agree with them, you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

## Know the types of difficult coworkers

When assessing the situation, it can be helpful to know some common "types" of difficult coworkers. Not every person will fall neatly into one of these categories. However, they're a good framework for approaching the problem.

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 breaks down some common types of difficult coworkers. So let's take a look.

## 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 may frequently take time off, do the bare minimum on a job, and create 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 being unavailable after close of business are just signs of a healthy work-life balance.

### 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. 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 in what you have to say. It's important that each employee has time to speak whether it be in a one-on-one conversation or in a group setting.

Coworker-to-coworker there's nothing wrong with saying "thank you for your input, however, I'd like to continue with the existing plan." Immediately shutting people down may just lead to more tension. That's why it's good to acknowledge their input, but make it clear that you're not looking for additional input right now.

Managers should also pay attention to this kind of employee. They may dominate group meetings, making less space for quieter employees with good ideas. Consider asking each employee in the meeting if they have thoughts on a particular issue. This creates space for everyone to have input.

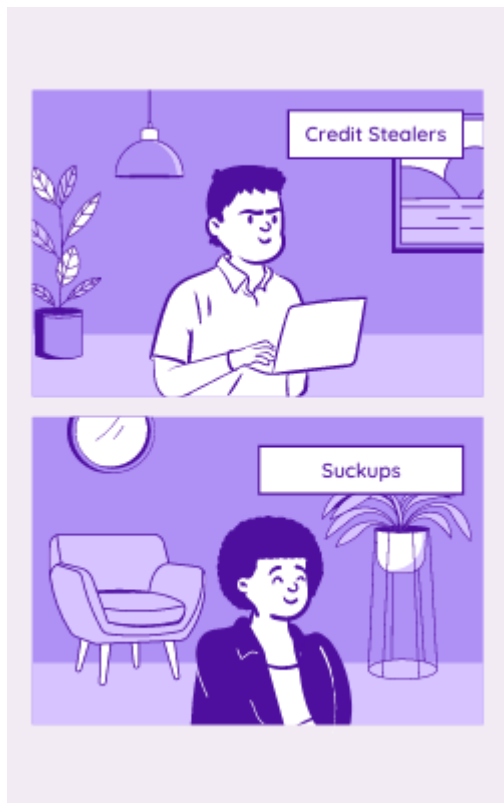
## Complainers

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.

Additionally, if the coworker is bringing up a legitimate issue, suggest ways they could improve the situation. If they're unhappy because another employee is always late sending them certain documents, ask if they've spoken to that employee about it. You'll quickly find out if they're actually interested in making changes, or just looking for a reason to complain.



## 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, someone that talks down your contributions, or even blatantly tries to take credit for your actions.

### How to cooperate with credit stealers

Be assertive about receiving credit for your own work. If a coworker is stealing credit for your work, it's important to step in. Using statements like "yes, we did meet with the client" and "*our* proposal is..." help make it clear it was a group effort. If you have regular team meetings or one-on-one check-ins, be sure to highlight your own work. Perhaps volunteer to speak first, that way your contributions are made clear before someone else can take credit.

However, sometimes this kind of situation needs a more direct approach. In that case, consider speaking directly with our boss about your concerns. 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 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**

Beyond these specific examples, some practices are just a good idea when trying to get along with others. You'd be surprised how many common-sense actions can make a big impact on your relationship with a co-worker.

## **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. Engaging in gossip is likely to make any existing problems worse.

## **Think before speaking**

You probably put a little thought into what you say in front of the team at a meeting. However, you should also be extremely careful about the words you use in conversations around the workplace. Before speaking, especially in the heat of the moment, ask yourself if it's a conversation better had later. When in doubt, it's best to hold off.

Words can slip out, and when that happens it could cause damage to your relationships with others. You don't need to point out the personal flaws of your coworkers, especially not in the heat of the moment. Things like performance issues should be pointed out. However, this can be done kindly, in the right setting, and kept positive.



### **Evaluate your own behavior**

Sometimes it's good to take a step back and evaluate your behavior in a situation. 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.