DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

How to Protect Yourself from Professional Button Pushers

AUDIO PROGRAM AND WORKBOOK BY
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About the Author

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Ms. Fee is the author of *Dealing With Difficult People, Building Resiliency, Dealing With Mean Girls, Positive First Impressions, Secrets for Successful Presentations*, and the college survival guide, *My Roommate Is Driving Me Crazy!* Learn more about her personal coaching, counseling, workshops, and other products by visiting [www.susanfee.com](http://www.susanfee.com).
INTRODUCTION

Dealing with difficult people can be challenging but they don't need to control your life. While their behavior is often offensive or condescending, you have the power of deciding how to respond. Right now, you may be feeling emotionally and physically drained, resentful, stressed, and hopeless that your situation will ever improve because the difficult person refuses to cooperate (but that's why the person is difficult!). Consider all those negative feelings as huge signals that it's time for you to change.

If you make the difficult person one hundred percent of the problem, you're also saying that person is one hundred percent of the solution. Do you really want someone else in complete control over your happiness? This program will teach you how to take back the control you've given up, set realistic expectations, define healthy boundaries, and determine when and how to speak up in your own defense.

Here’s What We’ll Cover in the Audio Program

- Role of Difficult People in Your Life
- Protecting Your Internal Thought Cycle
- Setting Realistic Expectations
- Challenging Belief Systems
- Establishing Healthy Relationship Boundaries
- When and How to Speak Up
- Disengaging from Button Pushers

This workbook is designed as a supplement to the audio program and offers additional resources. You will also find questions at the end of each page to help you reflect on the material and how it applies to you.
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ROLE OF DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Three Ways Difficult People Can be Helpful
• Expose our strengths and weaknesses
• Define our boundaries
• Recognize patterns

Protecting Your Internal Thought Cycle

Reflection Questions:
What are your most repetitive thoughts about your difficult person?

How do these thoughts affect your emotional wellbeing?
SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Dogs Will be Dogs

• Setting realistic expectations helps you determine an appropriate response.

“When people show you who they are believe them.”
- Maya Angelou

Signs of Unrealistic Expectations

☐ Resentful
☐ Angry
☐ Disappointed
☐ Consuming thoughts
☐ Complaining
☐ Plotting revenge
☐ Emotionally drained

Challenge Belief Systems

• Focus on what’s controllable
• Shift from blame to accountability
• Lose victim mentality
• Learn to co-exist

Reflection Questions:

What unrealistic expectations do you have for your difficult person?

How would your relationship change if you accepted him or her as a “dog”?
ESTABLISHING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARIES

Healthy Boundaries
- Flexible
- Honest responses
- Reciprocity
- Knowledge of wants and needs
- Responsible for personal fulfillment

Unhealthy Boundaries
- Rigid
- Avoid intimacy
- Rarely share personal information
- No close relationships
- Rarely ask for help

Unhealthy Boundaries
- Collapsed
- Can’t say no
- Chameleon
- Share too much, too soon
- Feel responsible for others’ happiness
- Absorb opinions, feelings

Reflection Questions:
What type of relationship boundary do you currently have with your difficult person? What behavior encouraged this?

If it’s an unhealthy boundary, what do you need to do differently to make it healthier?
**ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES**

**What’s Your Style?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
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**Speak Up or Stay Silent?**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Speak up if:</th>
<th>Stay silent if:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silence could be damaging</td>
<td>Goal is revenge, blame, inflict pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear desired outcome</td>
<td>Personality-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior-based</td>
<td>Unwilling to accept your contribution</td>
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**What do I Say?**

- Start with end in mind

“When (situation) happens, I feel (impact on you). What I want is (change you are requesting).”

- Success is based on having the courage to speak up!

**Respectfully Disengaging**

- Give up all efforts to change the other person.

- Give up all efforts to get the other person to understand your pain.

- Stop complaining.

- Define yourself separate from the relationship.

**Reflection Questions:**

In past conversations with your difficult person, how effective was your communication style?

In regards to your difficult person, what do you need to do more of: speak up or stay silent?
CONVERSATIONAL STRATEGIES

Chronic Complainer
Motive:  Gains recognition, power, and sometimes comfort in negativity.

Your response:  Set boundaries, offer attention for solutions, re-direct conversations to problem solving.

Sounds like:  “It sounds like you have the problem well-defined, what solutions on you’re working on?”
               “You’ve given a lot of attention to what’s going wrong; what’s going right?”

Overly Sensitive
Motive:  Easily offended, fragile ego, perceives every conversation as a potential attack.

Your response:  Focus on one idea at a time, converse often, ride out emotions.

Sounds like:  “I see by the tears in your eyes this information is affecting you. Would you like to take five minute break before we continue?”
               “Just to make sure I’m being clear, would you tell me your understanding of our conversation?”

Dominator/Explosive Anger
Motive:  Deep-seated fear, escalates quickly, resorts to threats, learned behavior based on results.

Your response:  Set boundaries, use empathy, avoid engaging, allow to “save face.”

Sounds like:  “I’m willing to talk with you calmly, minus the name calling. Would that be best now or would you like to set another appointment tomorrow?”
               “I can hear that you’re frustrated and you want your opinions respected. I want the same. Let’s meet privately in thirty minutes to discuss solutions.”
Passive-aggressive

**Motive:** Avoiding conflict face-to-face. Gains power from undermining and gossiping. Fragile ego.

**Your response:** Confront behavior (not person), hold accountable, state boundaries, refuse gossip.

**Sounds like:** “I want to build a trusting relationship. If there are differences, you have my word that I will speak to you directly. May I have your word that you will do the same?”

“I’m confused by your comments. When I spoke with you last week, you told me X. I’m hearing from others that you feel differently. Here’s your opportunity to clarify.”

**Choose Your Response Strategy**

Based on these descriptions, mark the communication strategy your difficult person most often uses:

- □ Chronic complainer
- □ Overly sensitive
- □ Dominator
- □ Passive-aggressive

List specific words, behaviors, and situations that your difficult person uses to employ this strategy:

____________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________

After listening to this program, how will you choose to respond to these difficult behaviors in the future? Be specific and write down exactly what you plan to say:

____________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________

**Reflection Questions:**

What is one thing you can stop doing today that will immediately improve the relationship with your difficult person?

What is one thing you can start doing today that will immediately improve the relationship with your difficult person?
REFERENCES


