

MDS Alert

Workplace: Cure Your Co-Worker Conflicts by Following These Tips

Avoid co-worker-induced stress with these tips.

Whether you're sandwiched between an uptight manager and an angry customer, or there's just someone at work who gets on your nerves, managing co-worker conflicts can be a breeze if you have the right attitude -- and a few helpful hints.

1. Recognize Different Personalities. Sometimes, you just can't seem to communicate with a co-worker. But the first thing you can do when you feel the weight of a stressful conflict is to realize that your co-workers all have different personalities and different styles and behaviors.

If you're at odds with a co-worker's personality, either try to match their behavioral style or learn how not to let it affect you - insulate yourself from that conflict, says **L. John Mason, PhD**, a stress management therapist with the Stress Education Center in Cotati, Calif. But insulating yourself means taking preventive steps to reduce your stress level.

2. Protect Yourself From 'Psychic Vampires.' When a co-worker is starting to drive you batty, there's an effective exercise you can perform at your desk that'll help protect you from what Mason calls "psychic vampires," or people who drain the energy from you.

Picture yourself in a protective cocoon or surrounded by an invisible force field. This can be a powerful shield against somebody who's needlessly negative or hostile toward you.

Mason says doing nothing in a negative situation can be draining, but picturing yourself in a protected setting won't hurt anybody and will make you feel a lot better.

3. Take 40 Deep Breaths Every Day. This is Mason's number-one tip for office receptionists who want to avoid stress buildup. Take one deep, slow breath every 10 or 15 minutes on the job. While you're doing this, relax your jaw, neck and shoulders -or whichever specific area that's burdened by tension--and then release that deep breath. Doing that "saves so much wear and tear that by the end of the day, you'll be able to focus better and get more done in less time," Mason says.

To ensure that you remember to take these 40 deep breaths, try to associate taking one deep breath with something that recurs. For example, try breathing deeply after every third phone call or after every third customer who walks up to your desk, or maybe every time you make an appointment for somebody who is leaving.

4. Avoid Excessive Caffeine Consumption. Many of us reach for a "cup o' Joe" every morning to get the mental spark plugs firing. That's OK, Mason says, but caffeine speeds up your adrenaline flow--adrenaline is a stress hormone--and your heart rate and can create a lack of focus for some people. Too much caffeine can also harm your sleep at night. And if you're having trouble sleeping well to begin with, "you'll wake up behind the eight ball in the morning," Mason says. So, minimize your caffeine intake and realize that it comes in many sources: tea, chocolate, and colas, among others.

5. Use and Develop Your Humor! Positive attitudes at the office really help. Mason says that workplace difficulties, when seen as opportunities for growth and proving your abilities, are less harmful.

6. Practice the 'Systematic Desensitization' Technique. Systematic desensitization is a process of seeing yourself encountering the person who's creating stress for you, says **Donald Dew**, president and chief executive officer of Habilitative Systems Inc. in Chicago. Here's what you should do. Before you get to the work place, relax yourself at home or in the car for a few moments. Then visualize yourself coming at odds with the co-worker or the person who's creating stress for you. But instead of picturing yourself getting dumped on, envision a situation in which you respond to that co-

worker in a more powerful way. Make yourself the victor in that situation by acting the way you want to act in a more empowered manner. "Basically, what you do is let the air out of a balloon of stress," Dew says. That'll help get you through your day.

And Dew advises office receptionists to hold on to their power of choice. "You have the power to feel however you desire to feel. Why give someone that power over you? So, it doesn't matter who it is, they shouldn't have the ability to control how you feel--you control you.