

How to Not be a jerk

APPLICATION

Jerks and difficult people are everywhere. The fundamental problem is that bad behavior is surprisingly tolerated by others in the work place and that jerks exist because they often suffer from a lack of good feedback. You may be experiencing your problem because others refuse to deal with you at a certain level in order to avoid telling you the truth!

INTRODUCTION

If this “How to” was sent to you, this is a likely indicator that you are doing things that others find very problematic. Difficult people are distributed evenly throughout society. The good news is most jerks can change if they know they are and want to.

IMPORTANT TIPS

Dr. Robert Bramson lists seven difficult behavior types: *Hostile-Aggressives, Complainers, Silent and Unresponsives, Super-Agreeables, Know-It-All Experts, Negativists and Indecisives.* You are likely doing one or more of these things on a regular basis with your co-workers and acquaintances.

KEY POINTS

1. Feedback – First you will need to find out if you are a jerk. You will need to get feedback on your behavior from someone who will tell you the truth. Remember, you probably don't know you are behaving like a jerk.
2. Reality Check – when was the last time someone gave you negative feedback? If you can't remember, this is a bad indicator.
3. Listen Carefully – you need to do a better job of listening and understanding the negative feedback that others give you. See the *How to Handle Criticism* for more help. This will provide you with a useful road map for change.
4. Career Limiting – recognize the being a difficult person may have helped to get you some things you wanted in the past, but over the long haul this will be career limiting.
5. Schedule Three Discussions – since you likely don't know you are a jerk, you will need to get some feedback to find out. Schedule three one-on-one meetings with three important components of your life – your spouse, a close friend, and a

- co-worker who has some backbone. Thank them for agreeing to help you, express your desire for honest unvarnished feedback, then ask this question, *“What do I do that you or others find annoying or uncomfortable?”*
6. Listen – to this feedback. Ask questions, and don’t deny any of the behaviors that are described. Just listen. Look for patterns – when does this occur? How often? How do others feel? Do not offer excuses for your past behavior – remember you are here to learn.
 7. Take Notes – Show that you are serious about change by recording the highlights of the negative feedback. Real jerks don’t like to write this stuff down. However, you do because you want to change. Right?
 8. Humor can Help – As you start to see a new picture of yourself emerging, deploy some humor to demonstrate that you are starting to see the light. Being able to laugh at yourself shows that you are human and possibly not a total jerk. You can call yourself one of these names, if it fits. Say, “You mean you think I am a:
 - *Connie Complainer*
 - *Harry Hostile*
 - *Iris Indecisive*
 - *Ken Know-It-All*
 - *Nancy Negative*
 - *Sally Silent and Unresponsive*
 - *Sam Super-Agreeable*
 - *Paul Political*
 9. Ask for Help – Remember that if you want to change -- you can. Don’t let guilt for past indiscretions freeze you and prevent you from initiating a change. Put your negative feelings about yourself aside – you just learned something important and very useful. Ask this person for two things a) suggestions of what you should do differently and why, and b) to pull you aside every time in the future when they observe you being a jerk and give you immediate feedback.
 10. Thank you – express your gratitude for each person’s honesty by sincerely thanking them for helping you.

Footnote

Don’t be a group unifier. “Having somebody who is really difficult can actually be good for the workplace,” said Jo-Ellen Pozner, a researcher in the Kellogg School of

Management at Northwestern. “If everyone really hates this one person, it becomes the basis of social bonding for the rest of the group.”