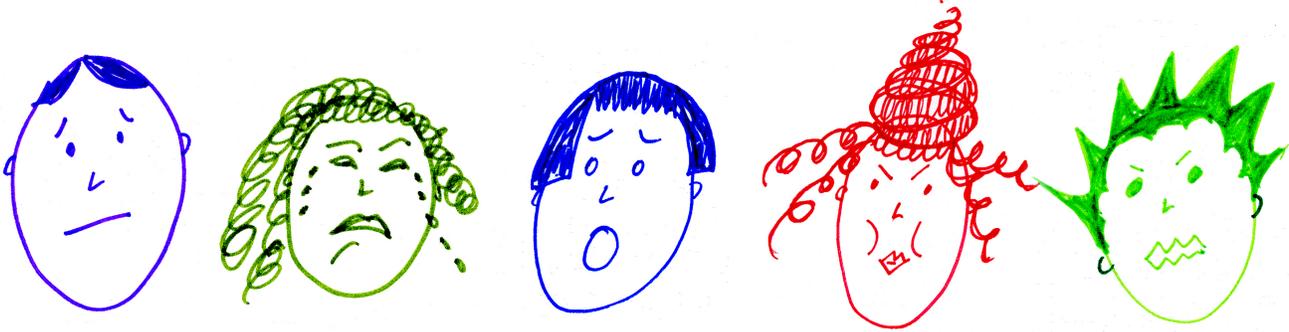


# Dealing with



# Difficult People

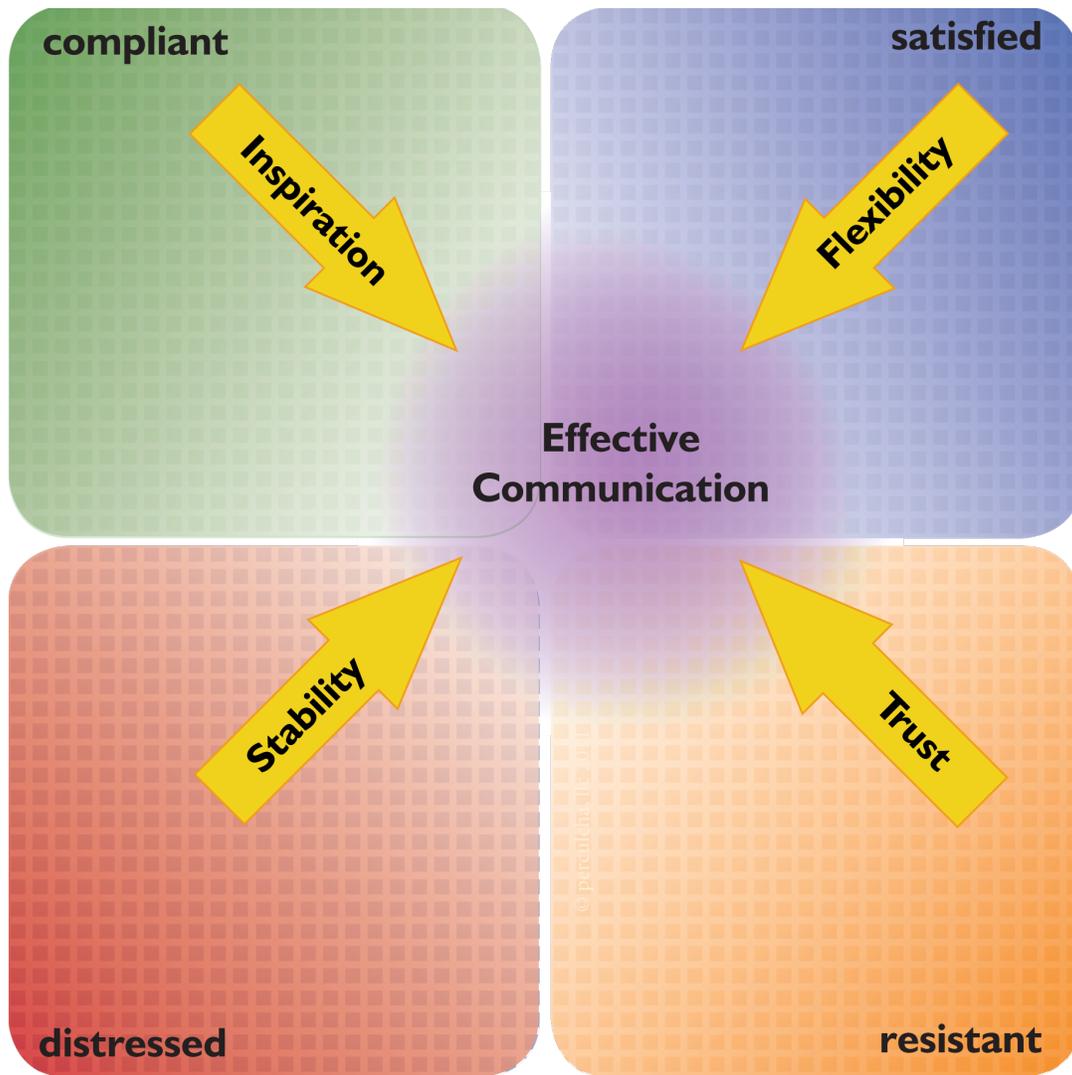
A new approach for  
less stress and more success  
in difficult situations

Presented by:

Megan Rounds, Ed.D, Owner, perculcha, LLC  
& Angie Becker Kudelka, BWSR



# Understanding Difficult People/Situations



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## Profiles of Difficult People

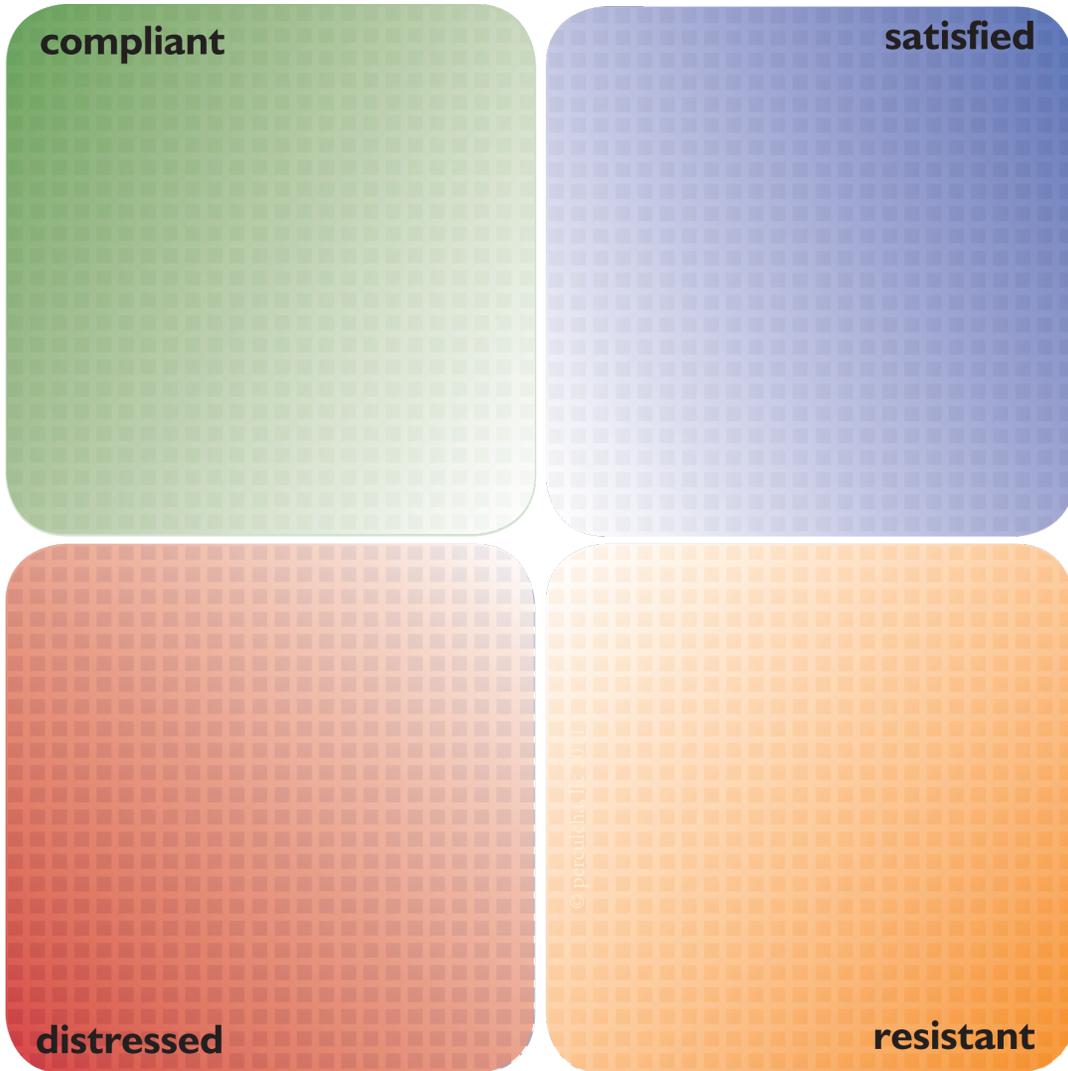
If I am:	Here's how I talk and act:	If I am:	Here's how I talk and act:
 <p style="text-align: center;">Compliant</p>	<p><b>Common behaviors:</b> Rarely shows emotion, doesn't get involved with anything other than what's required, does job but nothing more than what's expected.</p> <p><b>Common phrases:</b> "I just do what I'm told", "It wasn't my decision, why should I care?", "It doesn't matter to me", "whatever."</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">Satisfied</p>	<p><b>Common behaviors:</b> Show enjoyment for work/role, positive demeanor, demonstrates good understanding of role and expectations from others, voices alignment with position or situation.</p> <p><b>Common phrases:</b> "This is fun!", "I love this", "wow, is it quitting time already?", "It's all good!"</p>
<p><b>Difficulty Engaging</b></p>		<p><b>Needs &amp; Interests are Met</b></p>	
 <p style="text-align: center;">Distressed</p>	<p><b>Common behaviors:</b> Confusion, frustration, fear, scattered, inability to focus or get things done, depression, insecure, unsure, emotional roller-coaster (switches in emotion are often unpredictable).</p> <p><b>Common phrases:</b> "I'm totally freaking out!", "I'm completely overwhelmed!", "Why me?" "I just can't seem to get on top of this!", "Don't they know I'm only one person?", "Nobody understands what I'm going through", "What's wrong with me?"</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">Resistant</p>	<p><b>Common behaviors:</b> Anger (often masking fear), stubbornness, moody, small to large outbursts (may be contrary to typical behavior), negative demeanor, vocal about discontent, may try to build coalition of resistance, procrastination.</p> <p><b>Common phrases:</b> "They can't do this to me/us/you!", "They don't know what they're talking about!", "I won't do it", "I can't stand this place!", "I'm not listening to you." "Time to look for a new job".</p>
<p><b>Difficulty Adjusting</b></p>		<p><b>Difficulty Accepting</b></p>	

## Perceptions of Difficult People

If I am:	Here's how I see others:	If I am:	Here's how I see others:
 <p>Compliant</p>	<p><b>Satisfied</b> people are misguided, preachy, smug, pushy. They can also be amusing, in a sheep-like way.</p> <p><b>Resistant</b> people take things too seriously. Their efforts may be noble, but they're wasting their time.</p> <p><b>Distressed</b> people are unfortunate dupes who can't say no. They're overachievers who get what they deserve and are too emotional. Why they keep trying so hard is a mystery.</p> <p><b>Compliant</b> people are okay unless I have to do something because they won't do it.</p>	 <p>Satisfied</p>	<p><b>Resistant</b> people are negative Nelly's. They live in the dark side. All they seem to do is complain and try to bring me down. They take things very personally.</p> <p><b>Distressed</b> people are just over-reacting. They just aren't well equipped to handle stress, and seem to break down very easily.</p> <p><b>Compliant</b> people are lazy. They seem happy to do the minimum amount required to get the job done.</p> <p><b>Satisfied</b> people are happy and fun. They are hard workers and I can count on them to get things done.</p>
 <p>Distressed</p>	<p><b>Compliant</b> people have it made! They don't have to do much and still get paid the same (or more) than me!</p> <p><b>Satisfied</b> people are living in a totally different world. They clearly aren't living in reality, and think that everyone has it as easy as they do.</p> <p><b>Resistant</b> people complain a lot but want me to do all of their work. Sometimes they seem to be the only ones who understand my situation.</p> <p><b>Distressed</b> people are just trying to get by. We're often stretched to the limits and nobody seems to care!</p>	 <p>Resistant</p>	<p><b>Distressed</b> people should rise up and revolt! Can't they see they're being taken advantage of? This group mirrors the problems inherent in the system.</p> <p><b>Compliant</b> people just don't care. I wish they'd join "the cause", but they get irritated when that's suggested to them.</p> <p><b>Satisfied</b> people are delusional and smug. They live in their bubble and are ignorant of the struggles of others.</p> <p><b>Resistant</b> people see the truth in the situation (as long as we're resisting the same thing). We're passionate and willing to fight for what's right.</p>

# Understanding Difficult People/Situations

-practice sheet-



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# PRACTICE SHEET – EXAMPLE SITUATION

## **The Perspective of Person 1:** *(Use a blue or black pen draw the “route” of person 1)*

- a. You sit on an education and outreach committee with 6 other people. You’re glad the group is meeting. 4 weeks ago when you scheduled the meeting everyone said they’d show up. You’re really excited about the meeting today because you plan to share info about this new watershed game you’d like to buy for your organization. It uses new technology and you know it will be a great addition to your programming.
- b. This game opportunity just came to you last week. Even though it is not on the agenda, you know folks won’t mind the addition item to the agenda.
- c. During the meeting you bring up the topic and notice one member of the group looks annoyed, you start to wonder what you did to tick her off. The more you explain about the game, the more you’re getting those nonverbal signals, eye rolls – she finally stops looking at you all together.
- d. Then she tells you we don’t have money to buy the game. Wait! –The game adds value to our programming. The money is totally worth it and we can afford it. She is wrong.
- e. She must not understand the VALUE of this game – You have to make yourself heard – you quick pull out this success story from another group that used the game with great outcomes.
- f. She said, “that’s not the point?” -- Geez, this was really important to you! If she doesn’t like your ideas then fine, You’ll just shut up – Let THEM come up with the new ideas from now on.

## **The Perspective of Person 2:** *(Now we’ll read the same story some a different perspective, this time draw the “route” from this perspective using a red pen for person 2)*

- a. You sit on an education and outreach committee with 6 other people. You don’t want to go to this meeting today. 4 weeks ago when you agreed to come, your calendar was free, but now there are too many demands for your time. The last things you want to do is get in your car and drive 50 minutes each way for a 3-hour meeting – this is going to shoot your whole day.
- b. There’s he is – He wants to add that game-thing to the agenda? That’s going to add 20 more minutes to this meeting, which is already too long. You could be back in the office writing your BWSR report that’s due in 3 days.
- c. Oh – a watershed game – we have much more important things to discuss than a game right now. You can’t spend \$1,800 on this game when you don’t even know if you’ve been awarded your Clean Water Fund Application yet.. I’m going to tell him, “We don’t have the money.”
- d. He didn’t even hear me! He’s just going on and on about the value of this game. He doesn’t care about costs, overhead. Doesn’t he know that what it would look like to buy this game after we just told the county how little money we have for staff?
- e. Now he is talking about the success story of another group – that has nothing to do with what you said. You’re going to put a stop to this right now. You say that’s not the point and we shouldn’t talk about it right now anyway because there are more important agenda items to discuss.
- f. Finally, he stopped – whew! So young, so foolish. He’ll wise up when he gets older. Now, let’s move on....

# NOTES

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# DIFFICULT SITUATION/PERSON INDEX

Name 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Stage of Situation:  Before  During  After

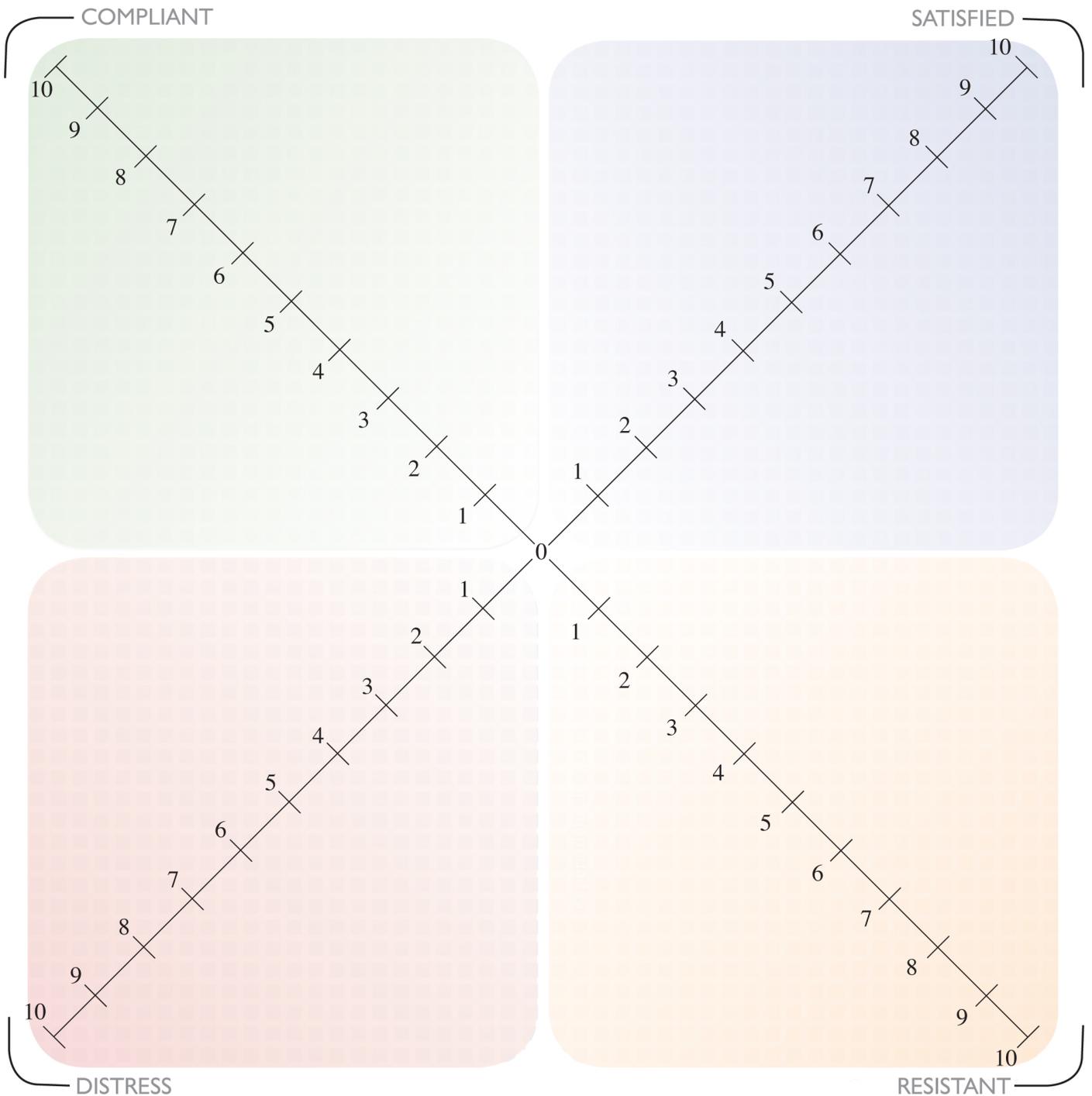
Name 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Rating Scale: 0 = No Reaction (indicated in center)

1 = Extremely Low Reaction

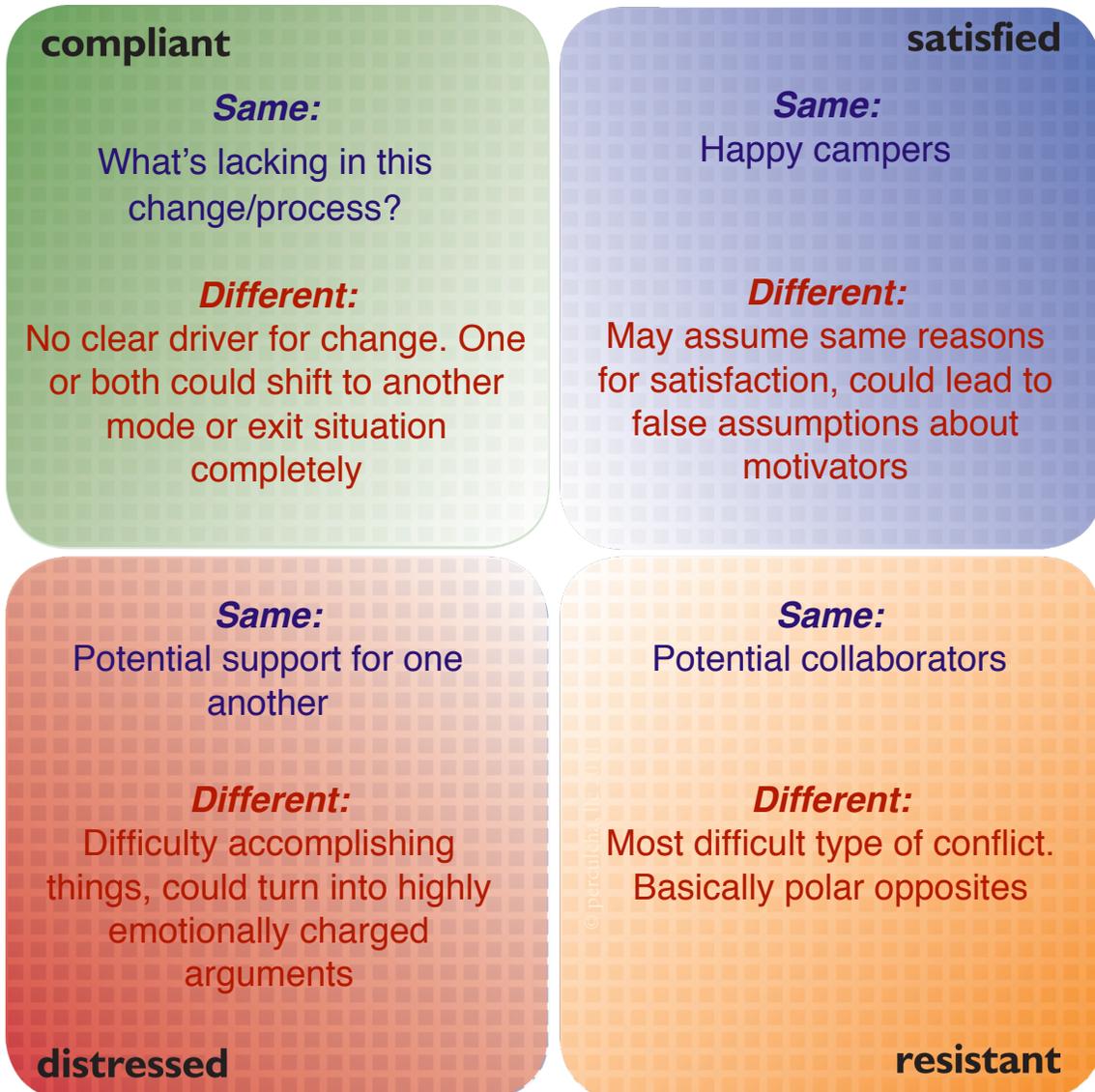
10 = Extremely High Reaction

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_



# Tips for Identifying Difficult Situations

## *Same and Different*



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## Shifting Difficult Situations

If the person is:	Tips for Developing:	If the person is:	Tips for Developing:
 <p style="text-align: center;">Compliant</p>	<p><b>Self:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ask questions about why in this mode:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Are you in this place intentionally or unintentionally?</li> <li>*Is there too much emotion?</li> <li>*Are too many people trying to lead/control?</li> </ul> </li> <li>*Are you trying not to lead so someone else can?</li> <li>*Are you observing to better assess the situation?</li> </ul> <p>- What is missing from this situation – what do you need to become inspired?</p> <p>- When have you been inspired or engaged in the past? How can you incorporate some of those components into the current situation?</p> <p><b>Others:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same questions as above</li> <li>- Ask questions about what like and don't like about situation. Try to amplify the positive – may find something inspiring in there.</li> </ul>	 <p style="text-align: center;">Satisfied</p>	<p><b>Self:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make small changes to your routine; change the way you answer your phone, drive home from work, general routines.</li> <li>- Be sensitive to the viewpoints and perspectives of others. Ask rather than tell.</li> </ul> <p>- Ask yourself questions such as “how can this be improved”, “why might I dislike this idea”, “what inspires me about this approach”.</p> <p><b>Others:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ask person to put self in your (or someone else’s shoes). Why might they resist, become overwhelmed, or disengage from the situation?</li> <li>- Make requests that require a small change in routine; a different meeting time or place, a change in seating order at meetings, etc.</li> <li>- Encourage person to ask others their viewpoints/opinions before they give their own.</li> </ul>
<p><b>They need:</b></p> <p><b>INSPIRATION</b></p>		<p><b>They need:</b></p> <p><b>FLEXIBILITY</b></p>	

## Shifting Difficult Situations

If the person is:	Tips for Developing:	If the person is:	Tips for Developing:
 <p style="text-align: center;">Distressed</p>	<p><b>Self:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you know about the situation, what do you need to know? Create a plan to gain that additional information.</li> <li>- What can you learn from other, similar, experiences? What worked or what could you differently to change the result this time?</li> </ul>	 <p style="text-align: center;">Resistant</p>	<p><b>Self:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Check your assumptions</li> <li>- What do you need in order to accept?</li> <li>- Where might this situation clash with your values?</li> <li>- What fears might this situation be bringing out in you?</li> <li>- Talk to others of different opinions – what do they like about situation and why?</li> </ul>
<p><b>They need:</b></p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">STABILITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who can you talk to about this situation (preferably those who have prior experience or can relate to what you're going through)?</li> </ul> <p><b>Others:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide structure, such as data, timelines, processes, history – help to pull them out of their chaos.</li> <li>- Connect with and/or encourage support networks, preferably with others who have or are going through something similar.</li> <li>- Encourage discussion about the problem – help them out of their feelings of isolation and disconnectedness.</li> </ul>	<p><b>They need:</b></p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">TRUST</p>	<p><b>Others:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ask questions:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*What's keeping them from accepting the situation?</li> <li>*What ideas for improvement do they have?</li> <li>*What values or fears might this situation be touching on?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Incorporate ideas/suggestions when possible</li> <li>- Listen for understanding <b>not</b> to judge.</li> <li>- Be open and honest in all communication (includes saying "I don't know" when you don't).</li> <li>- Walk your talk</li> </ul>

# NOTES

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# FOUR CHOICES

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In the middle of a difficult situation with a difficult person, we've got 4 immediate choices:

	<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
<b>1. Stay and Do Nothing</b>	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>2. Vote with your feet (walk away)</b>	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>3. Change your attitude</b>	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>4. Change the way you interact (your behavior)</b>	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

# While you are the middle of it...

## Strategies for Responding to Difficult Behaviors

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1. **BEHAVIOR: Rambling** - wandering around and off the subject. Using far-fetched examples or analogies.

Location in the model: *distressed*

Possible Responses:

- Refocus attention by restating relevant point.
- Direct questions to group that is back on the subject
- Ask how topic relates to current topic being discussed.
- Use visual aids, begin to write on board, turn on overhead projector.
- Say: "Would you summarize your main point please?" or "Are you asking...?"
- Other:

2. **BEHAVIOR: Shyness or Silence** -lack of participation.

Location in the model: *compliant or distressed*

Possible Responses:

- Change teaching strategies from group discussion to individual written exercises or a videotape
- Give strong positive reinforcement for any contribution.
- Involve by directly asking him/her a question.
- Make eye contact.
- Appoint to be small group leader.
- Other:

3. **BEHAVIOR: Side Conversations** – may or may not be related to subject. Distracts group members and you.

Location in the model: *compliant or resistant or distressed*

Possible Responses:

- Ask their opinion on topic being discussed.
- Ask talkers if they would like to share their ideas.
- Casually move toward those talking.
- Make eye contact with them.
- Comment on the group (but don't look at them "one-at-a-time").
- Standing near the talkers, ask a near-by participant a question so that the new discussion is near the talkers.
- As a last resort, stop and wait.
- Other:

4. **BEHAVIOR: Overt Hostility/Resistance** -- angry, belligerent, combative behavior.

Location in the model: *resistant*

Possible Responses:

- Remain calm and polite. Keep your temper in check.
- Don't disagree, but build on or around what has been said.
- Move closer to the hostile person, maintain eye contact.
- Allow him or her a way to gracefully retreat from the confrontation.
- Say: "You seem really angry. Does anyone else feel this way?" Solicit peer response.
- Allow individual to solve the problem being addressed. He or she may not be able to offer solutions and will sometimes undermine his or her own position.
- Ignore behavior.
- Talk to him or her privately during a break.
- As a last resort, privately ask the individual to leave for the good of the group.
- Other:

5. **BEHAVIOR: Talkativeness** -- knowing everything, manipulation, chronic whining.

Location in the model: *satisfied or distressed*

Possible Responses:

- Acknowledge comments made.
- Give limited time to express viewpoint or feelings, and then move on.
- Make eye contact with another participant and move toward that person.
- Give the person individual attention during breaks.
- Say: "That's an interesting point. Now let's see what other people think."
- Other:

6. **BEHAVIOR: Griping** -- maybe legitimate complaining.

Location in the model: *resistant or distressed*

Possible Responses:

- Point out that we can't change policy here.
- Validate his/her point.
- Indicate you'll discuss the problem with the participant privately.
- Indicate time pressure.
- Other:

7. **BEHAVIOR: Sharpshooting** -- trying to shoot you down or trip you up.

Location in the model: *resistant*

Possible Responses:

- Admit when you do not know the answer and redirect the question the group or the individual who asked it.
- Acknowledge that this is a joint learning experience.
- Ignore the behavior.
- Other:

8. **BEHAVIOR: Heckling/Arguing** -- disagreeing with everything you say; making personal attacks.

Location in the model: *resistant*

Possible Responses:

- Redirect question to group or supportive individuals.
- Recognize participant's feelings and move one.
- Acknowledge positive points.
- Say: "I appreciate your comments, but I'd like to hear from others," or "It looks like we disagree."
- Other:

9. **BEHAVIOR: Grandstanding** -- getting caught up in one's own agenda or thoughts to the detriment of other learners.

Location in the model: *satisfied or distressed*

Possible Responses:

- Redirect by asking, "Can you restate that as a question?"
- End the discussion by saying: "You are entitled to your opinion, belief or feelings, but now it's time we moved on to the next subject," or "We'd like to hear more about that if there is time after the presentation."
- Other:

*Adapted from: California Nurses Association, AIDS Train the Trainer Program for Health Care Providers (1988)*

# SIMPLE RULES OF NEGOTIATING

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This short list of rules that guide behavior can be used in all aspects of our lives, from identifying our core values, to defining user experiences.

Simple rules are highly utilized in the field of Human Systems Dynamics. Human System Dynamics Practitioner, *Bruce Pappas*, designed the following simple rules for use when negotiating. They can also be useful when involved in a difficult situation.

1. State the obvious. Not everyone may be thinking it.
2. When uncomfortable, unsure of what to say, or angry, ask a question.
3. Say what you have to say; then be quiet. Be comfortable with silence.
4. Share freely in front of others, not behind doors in closed caucus.
5. Look for ways to say “yes”, not “no.” If you can’t say “yes,” at least people will know you care.
6. Give what you can unconditionally. Do not expect something in return.

For more information about Human Systems Dynamics, and the Human Systems Dynamics Institute, visit [www.hsdinstitute.org](http://www.hsdinstitute.org).

# TYPES OF DIFFICULT PEOPLE

## and more importantly, How to DEAL WITH THEM!

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The bad news is - you cannot change other people.  
The good news is - you can change the way you react to them.

Here are 10 types of difficult people (or really 10 types of behaviors that make us think they are difficult people). Take a glance through this descriptive list below, and make a mark by 2-4 difficult types that you encounter in your work.

- 1. The Bellowing Bull**
- 2. The Sly Sneaky Snake**
- 3. The Grenade Gorilla**
- 4. The Genuine Know-It-Owl**
- 5. The Bogus Know-It-Owl**
- 6. The Calamity Chicken Little**
- 7. The Pleasant Puppy**
- 8. The Uncommunicative Clam**
- 9. The Complaining Crocodile**
- 10. The Compromising Chameleon**

Then, in your small groups, discuss a few, especially those that 2 or more of you encounter in your work life. Share specific behaviors that make these people difficult (no names needed!). Then, using the strategies listed in the following pages, choose specific ways (or brainstorm your own) you might react to this person the next time you find yourself in a difficult situation.

## **1. The Bellowing Bull**



You know you are dealing with a bellowing bull when you hear language typically like this: "You're an idiot, a genuine incompetent. I refuse to listen to any more excuses.." They are hostile, intimidating, inflexible, confrontational and critical. They don't just attack what you are doing or have done. They attack **you**.

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** Bellowing Bulls have a strong need to prove to themselves that their view of the world is always right.. They value aggressiveness and confidence and by demeaning other people, they create a sense of self-importance and superiority.

**How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:**

- Stand up for yourself and say something without being aggressive. "Wait a minute, I'm not sure you heard what I meant."
- Give them time to run down. Look directly at them and wait. Do not react – this may be hard to do at first. When they lose momentum, jump in.
- If you are cut off, say, "You interrupted me." Say it again if you have to, and start talking.
- Get them to sit down. Most people are less aggressive when seated. Say, "Look, if we are going to discuss this, we may as well be comfortable." If the Bull doesn't sit, remain standing yourself.
- Use language that does not express a direct attack. "I guess I feel differently about ..." or "My experience has shown ..."
- Avoid a head-on confrontation. Don't try to argue. If you fight, you may lose. Bulls are good at fighting. Be ready to be friendly. When they can't overwhelm you, they may see you as worthy of respect and make friendly overtures.

## **2. The Sly Sneaky Snake**



Sly Sneaky Snakes, like Bellowing Bulls, are insensitive to the feelings of others. They thrive on making rude verbal comments or a non-verbal roll of the eyes to make you look foolish. They don't attack you head-on like the Bull but take pot-shots at you with snide sarcasm and innuendo. They are skilled at using non-verbal whispers and knowing smiles.

**What is their motivation for this behavior?** Sly Sneaky Snakes have a strong need to get their own way. They also believe it may not be practical or politically safe to risk an overt battle when there is another less dangerous way - covert sniping and sarcastic language.

**How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:**

- Give the Snakes alternatives by questioning, "Do you have another solution?" They may respond, "Who, me? No, I agree with you." Questioning gives them an alternative to sniping. Say something like, "What did you mean by that?" or "That definitely sounds like a negative reaction - is it?"
- Get other points of view. In a group, it is wise to ask, "Do you all see it that way?" Do not tell the Snake, "See you're wrong." Instead, ask, "Can you be more specific?" Snakes will usually back down and slither away. They don't want to risk confrontation.
- Try to solve the problems that may be uncovered. You can often prevent sniping by holding regular team meetings for the discussion of issues as they arise, and work out potential solutions together.

### **3. The Grenade Gorilla**



The major difference between the Bellowing Bull and the Grenade Gorilla is that the Bull is aggressive and intimidating a great deal of the time. The Grenade Gorilla is usually more pleasant and amicable. But Gorillas have a tendency to explode and frequently the outburst is not planned by them nor expected by you.

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** This unfocused ranting and raving may have nothing to do with you or even with the present circumstances. Why do Gorillas behave this way? They lose control when they perceive even the slightest threat because they feel insecure.

**How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:**

- First, give them time to run down.
- If they don't run down, break into their monologue and get their attention with something like, "Wait! Stop!" or "Right!" or "Yes!" Don't be afraid to say something short and clear to get their attention.
- Show Gorillas you take them seriously. Say something like, "I can see that this is very important to you and I want to discuss it, but not this way (not here)." You may have to repeat this statement.
- If possible move to a private place. Tell the Gorilla, "I want to hear what you have to say, but not here - come into the office."
- When it's appropriate, use your strongest 'motivators' – appreciation and admiration.

### **4. The Genuine Know-It-Owl**



You will hear this difficult person say something like: "I am an expert in this field. Trust me, I know the best way to . . ." These folks believe they know the best way to do a job so the ideas of others are unimportant and irrelevant. They respond with irritation, anger or withdrawal to opinions different from their own. They often have a low tolerance for contradiction or opposition.

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** The "know-it-all" quality gets associated with superiority and stability in an ever-changing world. If good things happen, they caused them. This aura of certainty represents security to the Genuine Know-It-Owl.

**How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:**

- Do your homework. Do your research. Be prepared.
- Listen attentively and paraphrase the main points of what you hear. This will indicate that you appreciate and respect their importance, their instructions, and advice.
- Question, rather than state. Questions permit new information to be considered. Statements, however, are seen as an attack on their competence and knowledge. When you question, ask, "Could you explain . . ." or "How do you think what you are suggesting will actually look in practice?" or "How would you implement this . . . ?"
- Take time for reflection. Say something like, "That may be the way to go; let me think it over."
- Be a colleague. "Take a look at what I'm proposing; maybe you can work it into something."

## 5. The Bogus Know-It-Owl



Now take a look at the Bogus Know-It-Owls, difficult people who also believe they know it all and they do – but what they know may be all wrong. Often, you can tell the impostor by his or her language. Statements like: *"I know what I'm talking about. You can believe what I tell you."* Bogus know-it-owls think they know it all and speak with authority about that which they really don't know.

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** They have an overwhelming desire to be admired and respected by others – to be seen as important persons. At the moment of speaking, they really believe what they are saying. They may have the facts totally misconstrued but in their minds they believe they are right.

**How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:**

- Present your facts not as an alternative. Use language like: *"I've heard that . . ."* or *"Did you happen to read that article in the newspaper about . . ."* and go on to set the facts straight. Provide a way for them to save face.
- Fill in with conversation to give the phony know-it-all a chance to recover.
- Face them alone when possible. Presenting the real facts is more easily with others are not present.
- There may be no point arguing with a Bogus Owl. You can respond with the facts, but that won't necessarily convince her.

## 6. The Calamity Chicken Little



How can you tell that you are dealing with a difficult and negative **Calamity Chicken Little**? Their entire philosophy of life is built on the belief that the sky is falling, the sky is falling. Listen to their language. Chicken Little often says, *"That won't work."* If you protest, *"How do you know that won't work?"* you may hear something like, *"Because it's obvious."*

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** Calamity Chicken Littles are convinced that they have very little power over their lives, and that those who have power cannot be trusted. Their behavior is based on their belief that other people do not care, are indifferent or are self-serving.

**How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:**

- Do not be drawn into their despair. Express your realistic optimism. Say, *"I don't think we've tried everything."*
- Calmly and without emotion, discuss the problem. *"What is the worst thing that could happen?"*
- When an alternative solution is being proposed, raise the question yourself of negative events that may occur before Chicken Little does. *"That may not work either but it's worth a try."*

## 7. The Pleasant Puppy



How will you know you are dealing with a **Pleasant Puppy**? This type of difficult person has a very agreeable demeanor, but you need to listen carefully to their language. Ask the Puppy to do something and he or she will likely respond, *"I'll finish that for you. Want that done? No problem at all. No sweat."*

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** To please others and avoid any kind of confrontation which they hate, they say "yes" without thinking things through and often will over-commit. They accept unrealistic demands, saying "yes" when they need to say "no", or at the very least, *"but"*.

### How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:

- Request an honest opinion from them. Say, *"I really want to know what's on your mind."*
- Make it clear that their honest opinion or criticism will not displease you. *"Tell me – what part of the proposal do you think should be modified?"*
- Listen to their humor. Often it masks a hidden message. If a Pleasant Puppy says, *"Here's Mrs. Expert again."* You might respond: *"I've been wondering about your calling me that. Is there something I'm doing that gets in the way?"*
- If you manage a "Pleasant Puppy," try to help that person to develop more assertive behavior skills.

## **8. The Uncommunicative Clam**



How can you tell that you are dealing with an **Uncommunicative Clam**? Simple. Silence prevails. You will be doing most of the talking if you plan on communicating. The Clam may be one of the most difficult of the difficult types of people you will encounter in business and life.

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** Silence is usually frustrating to other people, so the motive might be calculated passive aggression or a noncommittal way of handling stressful situations. They may feel it is more expedient to keep their thoughts unspoken.

### How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:

- Ask open-ended questions that require answers with more than a Yes or a No or a number.
- Do not always fill the silence, if possible, with your conversation.
- If they remain silent, comment on what is happening. *"I expected you to say something and you haven't - what does that mean?"* End your comment with an open-ended question.
- If the Clam says, *"I don't know,"* to your questions, say, *"What else can you tell me?"* Stay expectant and wait.
- Ask, *"Am I wrong to believe that you are feeling uncomfortable?"* Pause. *"If not . . . what is the issue?"*
- If the Clam remains silent, you might end with an assumption and your plan for moving forward: *"I assume your silence means that you agree"* and indicate the steps you will be taking.

## **9. The Complaining Crocodile**



How do you know when you are dealing with a Complaining (Whining) Crocodile? They find fault with everyone and everything. They firmly believe that misery loves company, so they readily bring their problems and complaints to you.

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** They often feel powerless to manage their fate and have a very strong sense of the way things should be and the way other people ought to behave. They continually complain so they, personally, can feel more perfect in an imperfect world. *"It's not my responsibility. I've told you the way it should be. I've done all I can. Now it's up to you."*

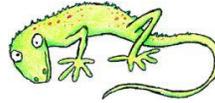
### How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:

- Try to solve the problem by asking questions. *"When does it occur? Who are the people involved?"*
- Acknowledge what they are saying by paraphrasing. Put the complaint into your own words and indicate what you think they feel. *"I guess what I hear you saying . . . and you are probably feeling"*

*pretty frustrated right now."* When you acknowledge their complaints take care not to agree with them – you can say you understand this is how they feel.

- Complaining Crocodiles often use the words, "always" and "never." So try to pin down their complaints to specific times, specific places, specific facts.

## **10. The Compromising Chameleon**



You will know you are dealing with a compromising chameleon when many of your questions are answered with a "Probably, Maybe, Perhaps, Possibly, Could be, I'm not sure, I suppose we could ..." and similar phrases. This type of indecisive individual finds it difficult to make a commitment or finalize a project.

**What is their motivation for this type of behavior?** They are often altruists who do not want to hurt other people. They will hint and hedge, sit on the fence, and equivocate as a compromise between being honest and not hurting anyone. They put off, postpone and procrastinate endlessly in the hope that a better choice will present itself – or that the issue just goes away.

**How should you deal with this difficult person? Strategies and language to use:**

- Make it easier for them to talk to you. Say something like, "I would really like to hear your comments, your opinion on . . ." Be pleasant and patient while you await their response.
- Sometimes you can expedite your conversation with a compromiser by asking, "What is the conflict?" or "What do you see as the major problem?"
- If you learn that you are the cause or source of their indecision, acknowledge that fact and emphasize your desire to help.
- State the facts without being defensive.
- If you are not the cause, you might give a compromiser a list of alternative solutions to a specific problem and ask him or her to rank them in order of priority.

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When dealing with difficult people, target one specific behavior to influence at a time. You can persistently influence behavior over a period of time but not all at once. And that's the operative word in dealing with difficult people – persistence. Stay positive and you can change your behavior when dealing with them. Then they have to learn new behaviors to deal with you.

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# SCENARIOS

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1. A colleague provides you with information every quarter so that you can prepare a status report for the board - and for reports to citizens, BWSR, and others. The person is always helpful and glad to contribute. Each quarter you've had to remind her more than once to email you this information, and typically she sends it at the last minute. She apologizes profusely about being late with her information – her excuse is that she has too much on her plate. Her last email to you said, "I'm sorry, I'm still working on the info for your report... I'm just totally overwhelmed with my workload. I'll get it to you right away." That was 3 days ago. She is a nice person, but her recent email aggravates you, because you can't complete your own deadline.

What "animal type" would you associate with this difficult person: \_\_\_\_\_

In which quadrant would you place her: (circle one) **satisfied, compliant, resistant, distressed**

How can you respond if you are her peer? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How can you respond if you are her supervisor? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. You are on a water plan task force. One member of the task force couldn't make the last meeting... the meeting where you proposed adding in a "Septic Inventory" to the plan. The remaining task force members thought it was a fine idea, however the person who couldn't make it to the meeting does not want this to happen. Rather than talk to you about it, you've learned that he is calling and emailing people, including your boss, to complain about you bringing it up at the meeting. He also has told others to, "Expect a knock-out, drag-down discussion at the next task force meeting because he is going to, "raise hell." The next meeting is in 10 days.

What "animal type" would you associate with this difficult person: \_\_\_\_\_

In which quadrant would you place him: (circle one) **satisfied, compliant, resistant, distressed**

How can you respond? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# NOTES

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