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Handling Difficult Work Relationships

You want your work environment to be enjoyable. You spend more waking hours there than anywhere else. That being said, sometimes, you'll have to work with someone you don't get along with. With the rise of virtual workspaces, many colleagues are benefiting from some time apart. However, even communicating virtually can cause misunderstandings or tension.

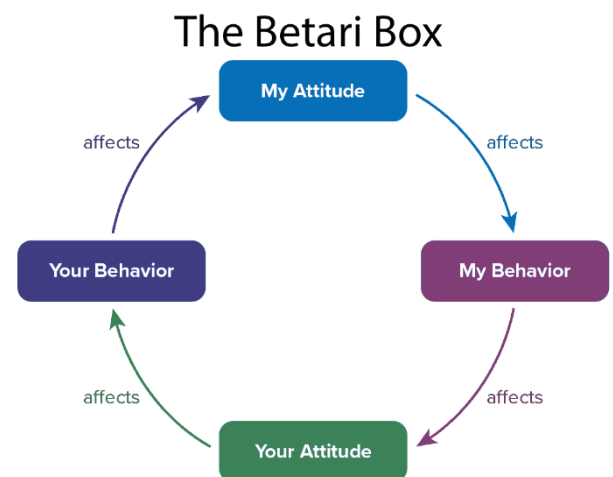
While it's natural to avoid people who cause friction, it's not always feasible. Also, avoidance can work against the team and your productivity. So, here are a few tactics to mend or maintain a professional relationship.

1. Reflect on your positive history.

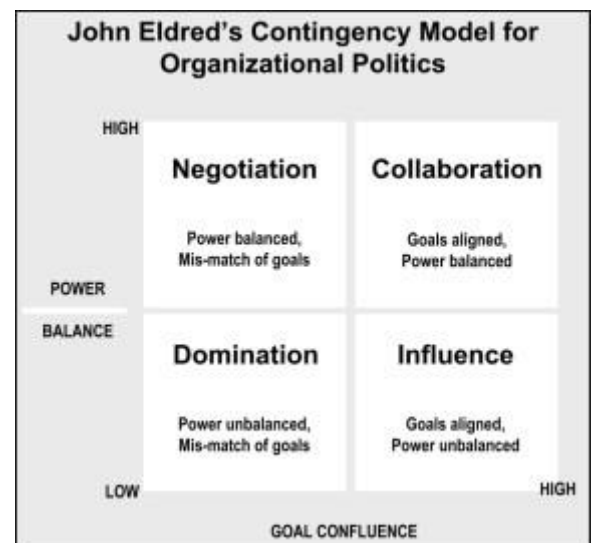
If a good relationship has taken a turn for the worse after an incident, research shows that reflecting on positive experiences with a co-worker can strengthen a broken bond. Another option is to use an impartial mediator to bridge the divide and find a quick resolution.

2. Look at yourself.

When we feel negatively about someone, we can become impatient, get angry, and demotivate others. And others can direct those negative behaviors back at us. The Betari Boxⁱ can help to break this cycle of conflict, stopping these harmful attitudes and behaviors in their tracks. It is a simple model that can help us understand the impact that our attitudes and behaviors have on the attitudes and behaviors of the people around us.



3. Find mutually beneficial goals. Have you considered that a difficult relationship might be because of a power imbalance? You can use Professor John Eldred's power strategies modelⁱⁱ to identify any conflicting goals or power imbalances and devise a method to communicate better and improve your relationship.



4. Accept everyone's personality.

You may find that a co-worker isn't doing anything wrong, but you simply don't enjoy their personality. This is a normal part of life as you find people you enjoy and people you want to avoid. Learn to accept that you need to get along with co-workers to meet your goal regardless of his/her personality. You don't have to be best friends, look beyond what you don't like and give them the chance to contribute to the work.

5. Know your trigger points.

Reflect on which behaviors of your co-worker you find the most challenging. This way, if they begin to exhibit these actions, you can immediately use your personal emotion management tools to navigate the situation in order to get work done. This technique can help you stay calm and collected at work and focus on directing your energy and passion toward things that really matter.

6. Show empathy.

Everyone has their own things to deal with, which explains why we all act certain ways at certain times. Try to show empathy as you get to know this person better. You may find that if you were in their situation that you may act similarly.

As we look to deal with difficult people, which we may be at any given time, our frame of mind plays a large role in the behavior we exhibit. When we're feeling motivated and positive, we smile, we complement our team, and we empower those around us. When we're feeling negative, the reverse is often true. We can be the opposite. We might even yell or argue, which can demotivate people. As these behaviors affect the people around us, they direct those negative behaviors back on us and the conflict ensues or gets worse.

Knowing how to deal with a difficult co-worker is an important life skill. Although you may enjoy many of the people you work with, you should know how to work with people you find difficult. Learning how to manage conflicts can help you maintain a more harmonious work environment. As you learn to accept or confront their behaviors, you can begin to focus on yourself and those you enjoy more.

ⁱ It is not clear who originated the Betari Box, or where the name comes from.

ⁱⁱ Blanchard LeaderChat <https://leaderchat.org/2019/10/26/new-to-the-team-and-they-want-you-out-ask-madeleine/>