



# *Work Smart Live Smart*

## **Tips For Handling A Difficult Leader**

**By**  
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It's the end of the day and you're exhausted, frustrated and wondering why you put up with these difficult people. Understanding why some people become more difficult or negative, and when they are more likely to act that way, can prevent you from obsessing about that one difficult person to the exclusion of all the others who were quite pleasant and appreciated your work. By reflecting on your role in these difficult interactions, you will be in a better position to learn strategies to head off and/or counteract the stressful effects of these encounters with difficult people.

So why are people difficult? The answers may lie in different areas, some related to the environment or sources of stress and some related to the "payoff" of using certain behaviours.

Occasionally, the person who 'pushes-our-buttons' may be our team leader. Leaders can face a variety of special challenges and sources of stress throughout the day that may increase their difficult reactions. According to the Executive Challenges Survey, 2003 by Axmith and Adamson, leaders face increased challenges associated with attracting and keeping talented staff, managing constant uncertainty, handling the bombardment of information from various levels, and maintaining a strong financial performance.

We often cannot change these sources of stress for our leaders so can we stop their negative attitudes and difficult behaviours from rearing their ugly heads? Unfortunately, the answer is no – not always — but we can control how we respond and desist from (inadvertently) rewarding behaviours that shouldn't be encouraged.

The main premise to work from is that difficult people use negative behaviour to get what they want. It has decreased their stress before and they are counting on it to work for them again.

Our goal is to stop rewarding these irritating and negative behaviours.

To do this, we must understand not only what people are going through but also what they expect to gain from being so difficult. Some want to feel more in control. Some want to feel important and listened to, and some want to avoid outright conflict, but will act out their annoyance or disagreement through other negative behaviours.

Our role is to find alternate ways of meeting their needs for control, importance or safety.

**In addition to appreciating their sources of stress, developing insight as to what reward there may be in using particular behaviours and finding alternate ways of meeting these needs, here are 5 quick tips that may also be helpful when dealing with a difficult leader:**

1. Learn and understand your leader's supervisory style - sometimes conflict occurs due to differences in styles of supervising and styles of needing to be managed
2. Clearly communicate your intentions, projects or workload - often we assume that our leader should intuitively 'know'
3. Provide only the facts and if possible offer solutions
4. Plan ahead for negative comments or questions
5. Consciously provide positive information and reinforce your leader's positive behaviours

Working with a difficult or negative leader can lead to burnout and take us away from a job/project that we may really enjoy. When the issue that we are working on is important, it is up to us to try and find alternate ways of working together to ensure that we are successful. Having a thorough understanding of the sources of stress for that leader along with understanding their typical reaction to these stressors can go a long way to decreasing our own personal stress.

Stress and wellness specialist, **Beverly Beuermann-King** translates current research and best practices information into a realistic, accessible and practical approach through her dynamic stress and wellness workshops, on-line articles, e-newsletters and media interviews and through a collaboration called *Awakening The Workplace*. Visit [www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com](http://www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com) for more on Beverly and her wellness work.

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