

## Dealing with Difficult People

Dr. Ron Kaiser February 19, 2014

### Dealing with Difficult People (Transcription)

Hi everybody this is Dr. Ron Kaiser welcoming you to the February 2014 podcast from The Mental Health Gym. The title of this month's podcast may seem kind of funny coming from a positive psychologist.

I'm calling it "Dealing with Difficult People". It actually came about as a result of a number of questions that I've been asked overtime which kind of revolve around the same issue of hey, we know that you like to think in positive terms, we know that you like to look at the bright side of people but don't you ever run into some really difficult toxic people who just really try your patience and make it very hard to enjoy almost any situation in which you have to interact with them.

My answer is of course I've run into those kinds of people and I think anybody who's not a hermit has crossed with some difficult people. I try to approach it not just from my stand point as a positive psychologist but also drawing upon the ideas of one of the other famous psychologists the late Fritz Perls who was a major theorist of Gestalt Therapy had identified two types of people, those who are nourishing and those who are toxic. You know what nourishing people are, they can get you all excited about being with them and excited about life, you can stay up till all hours of the night sometimes if you're with somebody who really generates that kind of excitement that nourishes you and the direct opposite are the toxic people.

They are the kind of people who not only drain your emotions but also cause you to either suppress feelings or behave in ways that you don't want to by acting just like they do. And that's what we wanna try to avoid, in other words I think that the most important first step in

dealing with difficult people is to make sure that we're entering virtually any situation with a positive mindset, a mindset that even if I am confronted by somebody who is negative then I'm not going to become like them. How do I develop strategies to ensure this? And you know I'm talking about you know, it could be relative, it could be a coworker, could be somebody that you meet at a party who lectures onto you because nobody else is talking to them.

It could be a clerk in the store that you're trying to return an item to on the 31st day because it doesn't work, but the warrantee was only good for 30 days or for 30 days. It could be you know, trying to explain to your credit card company or to some other kind of so called customer service operation, people sometimes on the other end of the line or people who are across the counter or across the desk from you at work sometimes just have this tendency to not only be negative themselves but do really try to induce negativity in yourself.

So I think that we should think in terms of an overall strategy that starts with a positive mind set, the notion that we're going to behave the way that we are because that's the way that we respect ourselves. Now when I am thrown into a situation where I'm dealing with a negative, difficult person who has the ability to ruin my day by not giving me what I want in terms of service or what else, the thing that I try to first of all assess is you know, is it my fault, did I do something that I could have done differently to avoid this situation, could I have read the warrantee better, could I have put this product together better.

Could I have really gotten there on time so that the other person didn't have a legitimate reason for you know, going off on me. So you know that's the thing that I have to look at and I have to look at it objectively and I have to be prepared to apologize you know even

though a really negative person may abuse the apology but it's something I have to look at for myself. Second thing that I try to assess is does the person have limitations that prevent them to being more helpful than they are or that prevent them from being more positive than they are. In some cases we're talking about somebody who's operating behind a company policy and they either don't have the power or creativity to do something different. They could be nicer about it but they're basically implementing a policy.

In some cases does the person have some personality difficulties based on their own upbringing or upon their own level of mental health that prevents this and sometimes that could happen. Are we dealing with somebody who is transferring their anger toward an entire group of people whether it be women, men, different racial groups, old, young, people with college educations, people without college educations, do they have some sort of insecurity that doesn't permit them to be positive in their interactions with you. Now the assessment part of it may help you to just at least understand them if you don't particularly like what's happening.

Second thing that you have to assess is how important is it that you deal with that particular person and how long or how often do you have to deal with it, with him or her. You know with relatives, we have to deal with them but we may minimize the number of times we have to do it and so in some cases we say ok, I'm gonna bite the bullet, I'm going to this family dinner, I'll spend some time with them but then I've gotta move on. If I'm getting an unsatisfying reception from a customer service on the other line of my bank or Credit Card Company or some other public utility for example, or some other place that supposedly is offering customer service, you know do I really have to deal with this person.

Is there a supervisor or as is the case with some credit card companies, can't I just hang up and take a chance that the next time I call, and I can error my complaint I'm going to be dealing with one of the other hundreds of clerks that are on the other end of the line. Can I just move on from there? You know is there another store that I can purchase this item from if the person demonstrating it is being very difficult. Is there a way that I can get away from that annoying difficult negative coworker who really makes it unpleasant to work in this situation? Do I have to stay stuck in this particular workstation? Do I complain, do I ask for some kind of a transfer? Are there ways that I can avoid situations because you know, once, we've tried you know there is a limit to what you can do.

I think it is very important to recognize that positive thinking is something that you can role model but you can't beat into somebody. You can role model it but just try and tell somebody to be positive when they don't wanna be positive, they got all the power. So you know, at some point it's important to move on whether it be to a different store, to a different location, to talk with different people at party and so on. You know the amount of interaction that you have to do, but role model positive stuff. They may pick up on it at some point.

Now sometimes we have to deal with negative people once we've assessed the situation we have to deal with difficult people if we wanna buy that particular car, if we want to work in this particular place, if we want to live in this neighborhood, sometimes we have to accept the possibility that we're not always going to get what we want. And then it becomes important to utilize the cognitive skill of telling ourselves that if we don't get what we want it's disappointing but not terrible. It's a whole lot better to not get what you want but maintain your self-respect than get into the mud and return negative comments on top of negative comments.

There is a certain amount of truth to the old saying that “Don’t get into a stink fight with the skunk, they’re better at it than you are”. You know there a lot of people in this world who have a whole lot more experience at being negative than we have at being positive. But I think we have to look at dealing with negative people in the whole overall scheme of the fact that we’re trying to develop different mindsets and different ways of interacting.

Dr. Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology has spoken and written about his vision of positive psychology being spread among the nations of the world and making the world a better place to live. Now that may seem impractical to some or grandiose to others but you know everything starts with a small step and it’s real important to recognize and not be little the fact that people can learn if they observe the fact that we did not become toxic in response to toxicity, we did not become negative in response to negativity so keep in mind the notion of positive thinking and being. It’s not just something for your own self-respect but it’s something that others can learn from.

Good luck, I hope you don’t run into too many difficult people but hopefully this helps to either provide a strategy or at least get you thinking about how you can react to difficult people. This has been Dr. Ron Kaiser with your February 2014 podcast, look forward to speaking with you again next month and in the meantime please visit us at [www.thementalhealthgym.com](http://www.thementalhealthgym.com).