



DEALING WITH difficult people

EMPLOYEE TRAINING

What do you think makes someone "difficult" to work with?



Visual recommendation: Title slide with two coworkers in discussion at a jobsite, neutral color palette, clear headline text.

Summary: Set the tone by focusing on the learning strategies – not labeling people. This session is about maintaining professionalism and productivity while navigating difficult behaviors.

Instructor Notes:

- Greet participants and set the tone: this is about skills, not blame.
- Emphasize respect, confidentiality, and practical tools.
- Highlight learning objectives.

Talking Points:

"We all deal with difficult people at some points – sometimes even ourselves."

"The goal is to respond with intention instead of reacting."

"By the end of this session, you'll have tools to recognize patterns, manage emotions, and create better outcomes."

Discussion Questions:

1. "What do you think makes someone 'difficult' to work with?"
2. "Why do difficult behaviors stand out more than positive ones?"

Call and Response:

"What's our goal today – win arguments or solve problems?" "Solve problems."

Anecdote Example:

"A superintendent I once worked with said, 'You can't fight fire with fire – you'll burn the job down.' He was right. Calm beats chaos every time."



Visual recommendation: Comic-strip style thought bubbles showing mild workplace action

Purpose: Build awareness of difficult behaviors without judgement.

Summary: Encourage participants to share real experiences in a neutral, nonjudgmental way. Builds rapport and surfaces common challenges.

Activity Steps:

- Pair up. Each person shares a 60-second story about a tough interaction (no names, just behavior and impact).
- After sharing each explains how they *wished* they had responded differently.
- As a group, discuss patterns that emerged.

Instructors Notes:

- Keep tone light but professional.
- Reinforce “no names” to maintain trust.

Talking Points:

“This is about patterns, not people.”

“Notice how your tone or body language changed between your first and second version.”

Discussion Questions:

1. “What changed in your second version?”
2. Did taking names out make it easier to focus on behavior?”

Call and Response:

1. “People aren’t problems. The problem is the...?” “Behavior.”

Anecdote Example:

“I once had a colleague who constantly interrupted. When I finally addressed it calmly, saying ‘I’d like to finish this thought before we move on’, it changed our working dynamic completely.

People are often labeled as “difficult” when they are stressed, misunderstood, or when roles and goals are unclear.



Visual recommendation: Venn diagram showing overlap of *Behavior*, *Impact*, and *Context*.

Summary: People are often labeled “difficult” when they are stressed, misunderstood, or when roles and goals are unclear.

Instructor Notes:

- Define “difficult” as behavior that consistently blocks goals, safety, or cooperation.
- Emphasize separating *people* from *patterns*.

Talking Points:

“It’s not about labeling someone – it’s about describing behaviors that impact the team.”

“Frequency and pattern matter more than once bad day.”

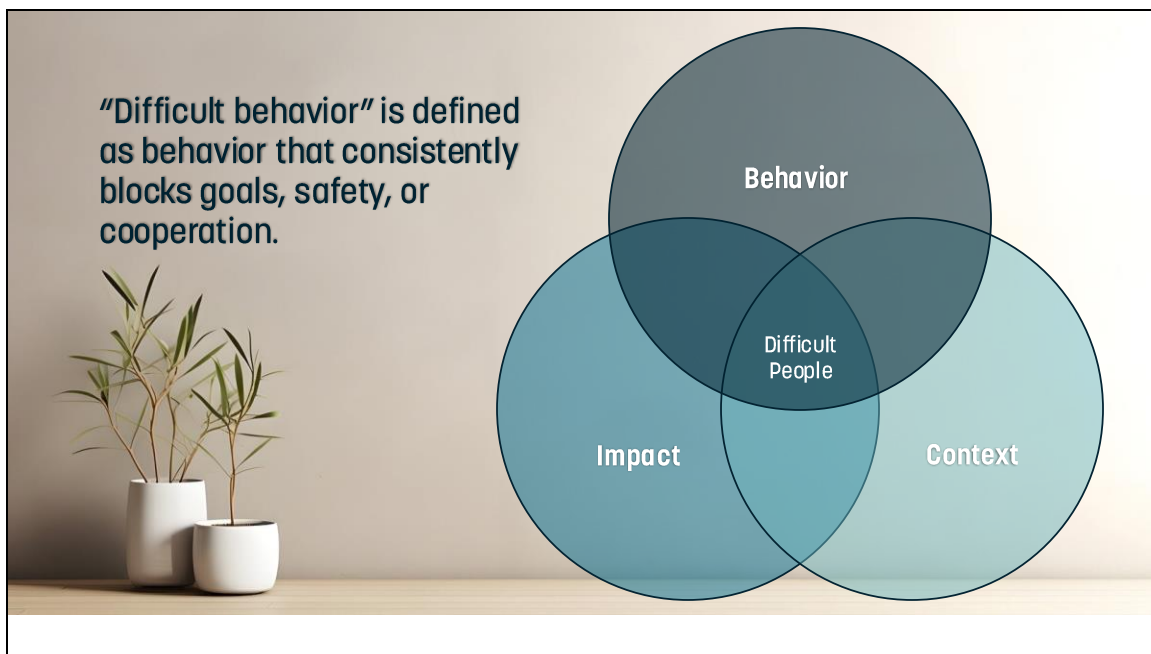
“When we define the behavior clearly, we can decide how to respond.”

Discussion Question:

1. “What are some specific behaviors that create friction on the job?”
2. “What’s the difference between a bad attitude and a bad day?”

Anecdotal Example:

“One foreman seemed uncooperative until we realized his team was short-staffed. His frustration wasn’t attitude – it was exhaustion.”



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Visual recommendation: Eight character grid, each with simple icon and label (Steamroller, Sniper, Ghost, Victim, Know-It-All, Blamer, Exploder, Back-Channeler)

Summary: Recognize eight common behavior patterns. Each has motivations and ways to manage effectively.

Persona

Traits

How to Respond

Steamroller

Dominates, interrupts

Pause, redirect, timebox discussion

Sniper

Sarcastic, undermines

Label behavior calmly, redirect

Ghost

Avoids contact

Set deadlines, confirm follow-up

Victim

Helpless attitude

Shift focus to solutions

Know-It-All

Dismissive

Acknowledge expertise, suggest test

Blamer

Deflects responsibility

Focus on next steps, not fault

Exploder

Emotional outbursts

Stay calm, pause and reset

Side-Talker

Gossips, side-talks

Bring discussion on record

Pidegon

Instructor Notes:

These are ***behavior patterns***, not personality types.

Everyone has shown some of these under pressure.

Ask participants which they've encountered most often.

Share the QRG handout with the participants.

Talking Points:

"These are patterns, not people."

"We've all be one of these at some point."

"Once we know the type, we can choose the right tool."

Discussion Questions:

"Which persona do you encounter the most often?"

"Which one drains your energy?"

"Which do you think you might slip into when stressed?"

Call and Response

"When in doubt, describe the ...?" "Impact"

Anecdotal Example:

"I once worked with a 'sniper'. He'd make sarcastic comments during meetings. I finally said, 'that sounded pointed – want to talk about it?' He was shocked, but it worked."



The Steamroller

"My way or the highway!"

Motivated by: Control and fear of losing credibility.

Typical Behavior: Dominates conversation, interrupts others, pushes agenda.

How to Respond: Calmly pause, acknowledge their input, and redirect.

Quick Line: "You've covered a lot – let's hear to more view points (opinions)."



The Sniper

"Sarcasm is my armor."

Motivated by: Frustration, feeling powerless or unheard.

Typical Behavior: Undermines with jokes or side comments.

How to Respond: Call out calmly, turn the jab into a conversation starter.

Quick Line: "That sounded intentional - can we talk about why you said that?"



The Ghost

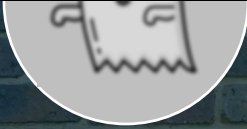
"If I don't reply, it's not real."

Motivated by: Avoidance, fear of mistakes, overwhelmed by workload.

Typical Behavior: Misses deadlines, ignores messages, dodges accountability.

How to Respond: Clarify deliverables, confirm deadlines in writing, follow up briefly, but consistently.

Quick Line: "Can we agree on a Friday check-in to make sure we're aligned?"



The Victim

"Nothing ever goes right for me."

Motivated by: Desire for sympathy, and fear of responsibility.

Typical Behavior: Complains, blames circumstances, avoids taking initiative.

How to Respond: Acknowledge struggle, shift focus to what's controllable.

Quick Line: "What's one small step we can take today?"



The Know-It-All

"I've already solved that...", "I already know that..."

Motivated by: Validation of expertise, fear of irrelevance.

Typical Behavior: Dismisses feedback, lectures, and resists new methods.

How to Respond: Acknowledge skill, propose a short trial, or a test.

Quick Line: "You've got a lot of experience – let's compare both approaches for a week."



The Blamer

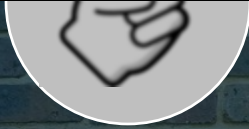
"It wasn't me."

Motivated by: Fear of punishment, loss of 'face'.

Typical Behavior: Deflects responsibility, points fingers.

How to Respond: Separate facts from blame, focus on the next steps.

Quick Line: "Let's list what we can control and fix together."



The Exploder

"You'll hear me before you see me."

Motivated by: Feeling disrespected, loss of control.

Typical Behavior: Raises voice, emotional outbursts, intimidation.

How to Respond: Stay calm, pause the conversation, re-engage once settled.

Quick Line: "I can see you're upset - let's take a moment and come back to it."



The Side-Talker

"I'll tell everyone, but you."

Motivated by: Desire for influence without confrontation

Typical Behavior: Spreads side conversations or gossip.

How to Respond: Bring issues to open discussion, create a safe space for direct talk.

Quick Line: "Let's put that on the record so everyone is clear."



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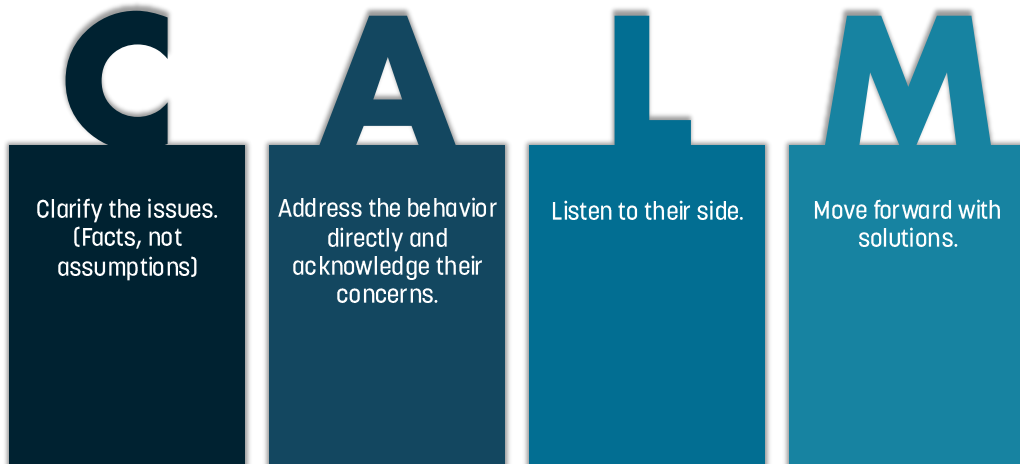
Call and Response

"When in doubt, describe the ...?" "Impact"

Anecdotal Example:

"I once worked with a 'sniper'. He'd make sarcastic comments during meetings. I finally said, 'that sounded pointed – want to talk about it?' He was shocked, but it worked."

The C.A.L.M. Method



Visual recommendation: Horizontal ribbon with 4 steps: *Clarify > Address > Lead > Move forward*

Summary:

Provides a structured repeatable process for responding to difficult situations. Clarify > Address > Lead > Move forward

Instructors Notes:

- Explain the C.A.L.M. structure during tough moments.
- C – Clarify the issue (facts, not assumptions)
- A – Address and acknowledge.
- L – Listen and lead.
- M – Move forward with solutions.

Talking Points:

“CALM gives you a roadmap when emotions run high.”

“You don’t have to fix everything – you just need to guide the next step.”

“Clarifying creates calm.”

Discussion Questions:

1. “Which part of C.A.L.M. do you skip most often?”
2. “How might using C.A.L.M. change your next tough conversation?”

Call and Response:

1. “If it’s not written down...” “ It doesn’t exist.”

Anecdotal Example:

“In a heated jobsite meeting, I used C.A.L.M. I clarified the issue, acknowledged and addressed the frustration, and offered two paths forward. The meeting ended in 10 minutes – no shouting.”



Activity – Stop-Swap-Say

Visual recommendation: Stopwatch icon and three-step visual (stop, sway, say).

Summary: Practice real-world scenarios in a safe environment. Builds muscle memory for using C.A.L.M.

Activity:

- Groups of 3 (Speaker, Difficult Persona, Observer) rotate through real scenarios.
- **Stop:** Identify which persona you're facing.
- **Swap:** replace a poor reaction with a better one.
- **Say:** Practice using C.A.L.M. language out loud.

Scenarios:

- A peer/colleague who side-talks in meetings.
- A crew member refusing a task.
- A vendor/subcontractor using sarcasm.
- An engineer delaying responses.

Instructors Notes:

- Time each round (~3 minutes).
- Encourage creativity but realism.
- Praise participants who keep composure.

Talking Points:

"We learn best by doing."

"You'll rotate roles: Speaker, Difficult Persona, and Observer."

"Observers give feedback: What worked? What could improve?"

Debrief Question:

1. "Which tactic changed the tone the fastest?"
2. "What surprised you about how it felt to use C.A.L.M.?"

Anecdotal Example:

"One project engineer practiced with a 'Know-It-All' scenario. After the exercise, he said, 'It's crazy how much easier it is when you just pause first.'"

Boundaries, Documentation, and Escalation



Boundaries protect professionalism.



Escalate when the issue affects safety, legality, or respect.



Documentation doesn't mean telling on someone – it's about clarity.

Visual recommendation: Pod graphic with icons for *Boundary*, *Escalation*, and *Documentation*

Summary: Boundaries protect professionalism, escalation ensures safety and fairness.

Instructors Notes:

- Emphasize professionalism and escalation paths.
- Boundaries show respect – for yourself and others.
- Teach “state the boundary and the why, and the alternative.”

Talking Points:

“Boundaries are not walls – they’re rules of engagement.”

“Escalate when the issue affects safety, legality, or respect.”

“Documentation doesn’t mean tattling/telling on someone – it’s about clarity.”

Example:

“I want to help, but yelling isn’t productive. Let’s walk away for five minutes and then come back...”

Discussion Questions:

1. “What’s one boundary you wish you’d see earlier in your career?”
2. “How do you know when it’s time to escalate?”

Anecdotal Example:

“I once had to document a conflict that seemed small at the time. That record saved the project when the same issue came up again months later.”



Summary: Encourage participants to choose one action they'll apply immediately.

Instructor Notes:

Ask each participant to write one behavior they'll practice this week.
Encourage sharing one aloud to the group.

Talking Points:

"Change starts small – one phrase, one reaction, on choice."
"Consistency is what makes culture shift."

Discussion Question:

"What will you do differently after today?"
"What's one new behavior or phrase you'll use this week?"

Anecdote Example:

"A week after a similar session, a crew lead told me, 'I tried C.A.L.M. on a guy who always snaps– and it actually worked.'"



Questions



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