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How Do You Handle Working With Colleagues You Don't Like?

We've all been there, waking up in the morning with dread in our hearts as we prepare to face the inevitable – heading to work and having to deal with a colleague (*or two*) who we really wish wouldn't be there. Pompous jerk, annoying nudge, or incessant complainer, an insufferable colleague can negatively affect your attitude and performance. Instead of focusing on the work you have to do together, you may end up wasting time and energy trying to keep your emotions in check and attempting to manage the person's behavior.

Curious about what the conversation is out there about this topic, we set out to ask this question on social media - *How Do You Handle Working With Colleagues You Don't Like?*

Some choice responses were (all quoted verbatim):

"Ignore.. its work..u go to office, buat kerja.. then balik.. the more u keep telling urself that u x like them, the more difficult it will be.."

"Count to five, take a deep breath and remind yourself, everything is ok. High five yourself in the morning and tell yourself, you got this and its only one person. For all you know they have issues with their own families and taking it out on others."

"I have that exact situation. The only way is to give them a wide berth. Unless u have to work with that person in close proximity or heaven forbid, have to collaborate directly...then...have fun!"

Avoiding them seems like the best solution, and let's face it - you can find a million ways to avoid someone, but this doesn't solve your problem. If you want to evolve and move forward you have to find a way to work with them.

Why is it important to deal with someone you don't like at work?

In order to enjoy your job, it's important to find ways to deal with someone you don't like at work. Rather than letting this person test your patience, you need to find strategies to create a more harmonious workplace. By finding ways to either accept or resolve this coworker's behavior, you can focus on your job and overall happiness.

But first, ask yourself...

Is It Them ... Or Is It Me?

You're probably saying, "it's definitely *them*." The more realistic answer is: it's both of you. This is the hardest part to accept, but it takes two to tango. The first place to start is being aware of the *attribution bias*. This is our tendency to blame our mistakes or shortcomings on external factors and other people's mistakes or shortcomings on their actual character.

As an example, let's say you're late to work. The attribution bias would have you exonerate your own lateness by claiming there was heavy traffic. But if someone else is late to work

though, they're obviously lazy. When you have a nemesis at work, your brain will play the attribution bias trick on you. This is the time to remember that it's not necessarily their character, it might *be* something about their environment.

Keep your distaste to yourself

Avoid the temptation to gripe with other coworkers. We all have a tendency to look for confirmation of our own opinions, but we should also resist it as emotions are so contagious, you can bring everyone down. Complaining about someone in your office can reflect negatively on you. You may garner a reputation as unprofessional or be labeled as the difficult one. If you find you have to vent, choose your support network carefully. Ideally, choose people outside the office.

Use your communication skills

Try your best to resolve any conflict in the office by asking this coworker to privately talk to you for a moment. When it's time to speak with this person, remember you use "I" language. With this communication strategy, you take ownership for your own feelings and help the person understand how their behavior affects you. This can make them feel more open to an honest conversation.

Here are some examples of "you" statements vs. "I" statements:

- *"You always expect me to finish your work." vs. "I feel disrespected when you assume I can finish your tasks."*
- *"You keep interrupting me." vs. "I feel that my thoughts and opinions matter, so I would appreciate it if you gave me a chance to speak."*

Try Little Things to Get Along

You don't have to make grand gestures to build a working relationship. Smile at them. Give them a nod in a meeting. Offer to grab a cup of coffee or go out to lunch. Small gestures can help the person respond completely differently. The goal is to make it easier to work with someone you don't like. So, don't worry so much about changing the other person but think about changing what YOU do.

Bond with your other coworkers

Direct your attention to other coworkers. Instead of trying to get along with this person, make an effort to bond with those you enjoy being around. Find people who have a similar attitude about life as you to connect with. By surrounding yourself with uplifting and inspiring people, you can significantly improve your work environment.

Take Breaks from Working with Them

Set limits on how much time and energy you're willing to give to work with someone you don't like. Then, once you reach your limit, disconnect from them emotionally and physically. If they work in the cubical next to you, walk away for a little bit or put on headphones and tell them you're going to be "in the zone" for a bit. The goal is to give yourself a chance to breathe deep and calm your mind.

Adopt a don't-care attitude

In situations where you are truly stuck and can't provide feedback, just practice the fine art of emotional detachment or not giving a sh*t. By ignoring the irritating behaviors, you neutralize the affect on you. This type of cognitive reframing can be effective in situations where you have little to no control.

Continue to be respectful

Be mindful of what you say about this coworker to other people you work with. Keeping conversation positive and professional can help you act within your company's guidelines. By continuing to be respectful, you can maintain a positive reputation at work. This coworker you dislike may even learn to show you respect in return.

Nobody is everybody's cup of tea, and there's no requirement for colleagues to get on. But when issues bubble up to the surface, they can pose big problems. It's far more productive to focus on your own behavior because you can control it. Practice a relaxation method daily if triggered by these people. This will enhance your ability to handle stress, which means the annoying person isn't that annoying anymore.

This final social media response aptly sums it up, "Really have to constantly remind yourself that it's a job. They're not your friends. You don't have to like them to work with them. Sure it makes it easier if you do but as we grow older, we also realize life isn't all peaches and cream."

There's that then. Time to get your tasks done, and head on home.

References

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