

## Workplace Strategies and Coping

*Stop wishing these people were different.*

### Personal Techniques

- Realize that fear and feeling vulnerable come from the perception of danger and not from weakness.
  - ▶ Avoid comparing yourself with others. Each of you will react in your own way.
- Manage your confidence: one goal is to erode the belief in yourself, so ask yourself:
  - ▶ *What is the quality of my relationship with others I help?*
  - ▶ *Am I confident in my competence?*
  - ▶ *How is my emotional effectiveness towards others?*



### Workplace

#### ::: Develop scripted responses

- ▶ *I'll be at my desk when you are done with your phone call I'll be happy to help you.*
- ▶ *Let me think about that.*
- ▶ Pause.
- ▶ *I can only speak to one person at a time; or I'm having a hard time hearing you.*
- ▶ Use silence.
- ▶ Don't over explain; keep it simple, you may need to repeat the same thing several times.
- ▶ Lower voice so they have to reduce theirs to hear you.
- ▶ *I want to hear what you are saying, but I've got to ask you to slow down a bit.*

#### ::: Formulate a plan for interrupting the interaction

- ▶ Rotate people at window.
- ▶ Have scripted language.
- ▶ Decide on a code word when needing assistance.
- ▶ Practice, practice, practice the plan to get identified person (clerk or other) to assist.
- ▶ Don't interact any longer than necessary.

#### ::: Utilize: Fight, Flow, Flee concept

#### ::: Space

- ▶ Give yourself and the individual additional personal space.
- ▶ Stand with hands open and present body at an angle.
- ▶ Use highest counter and/or have tables to the side to do the work.
- ▶ Signage: Examples
  - If you are on your cell phone the next person in line will be called.
  - For the privacy of all please stand behind this sign (line on the floor) until you are called.

## ⋮ Supervisors

- ▶ Teach the Flight, Flow, Flee concept.
- ▶ Develop a plan to:
  - Assist or relieve an employee.
  - Be contacted to relieve person if you are in court.
  - Practice the plan.
  - Develop a code word.
  
- ▶ Push health and wellness up the list of priorities.
  - Find a spot in the office to post or circulate pamphlets and handouts about wellness
- ▶ Encourage employees to take a break during the workday.
- ▶ Encourage employees to eat lunch *away from their desks*.
- ▶ You take a break during the day.
- ▶ You eat your lunch away from your desk.
- ▶ Have an on-site EAP orientation so that individuals can self-refer or when you refer them they have an idea what it is about.
- ▶ Encourage individuals to use EAP services, make it non-judgmental.
- ▶ Get support for yourself, it's lonely at the top. Managers tend to be very isolated and have very stressful jobs themselves.

## ⋮ Self-Care

- ▶ Practice: Fight, Flow, Flee.
- ▶ Develop healthy detachment.
  - Do the unexpected: breathe, think, and respond calmly.
  - Get physical distance between you and them.
- ▶ Keep Central Nervous System as relaxed as possible.
- ▶ Seek peer or professional counseling if necessary.

## At Home

- Realize that fear and feeling vulnerable come from the perception of danger and not from weakness.
- Keep your daily life as normal as possible.
- Spend time with others who are supportive.
- Do things that feel good and increase feelings of self-control.
- Find time to relax, exercise, and eat properly (avoid sugar and caffeine).
- Structure your time – keep busy.
  - ▶ Exercise.
  - ▶ Take steps to achieve personal balance –look at what gives you energy and what takes it away.
  - ▶ Commit to establishing boundaries.



## Difficult Person Coping Plan

- Self-care:
  - Do the unexpected: breathe, think, and respond calmly.
  - Keep CNS relaxed.
- Develop scripted responses:
  - I am going to go back to my desk when you have completed your phone call I'll be happy to help you.
  - Let me think about that for a few minutes.
  - I can only speak to one person at a time; or I'm having a hard time hearing you
  - Have a code word for needing assistance: practice, practice, practice.
- Develop healthy detachment:
  - Stop wishing they were different.
  - Get physical distance between you and them.
- Formulate a plan for interrupting the interaction:
  - Signage.
  - Different people at window.
  - Code word.
- Encourage employees to take a break during the workday.
- Encourage employees to eat lunch away from their desks.
- You take a break during the day.
- You eat your lunch away from your desk.
- Push health and wellness up the list of priorities:
  - Healthy lifestyle competitions (biggest losers).
  - Exercise.
  - Participate in health-related seminars.
- Have an on-site EAP orientation so that individuals can self-refer or when you refer them they have an idea what it is about.
- Refer individuals for EAP services and encourage people to use it, make it non-judgmental.
- Get support for yourself, it's lonely at the top. Managers tend to be very isolated and have very stressful jobs themselves.
  - Commit to establishing boundaries.
  - Take steps to achieve personal balance – look at what gives you energy and what takes it away.

- Use silence.
- Keep your daily life as normal as possible.
- Spend time with others who are supportive.
- Do things that feel good and increase feelings of self-control.
- Find time to relax, exercise, and eat properly (avoid sugar and caffeine).
- Structure your time – keep busy.
- Don't take what happened personally. "Why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?"
- Deal with feelings of guilt. Don't take responsibility for what happened. Realize that you cannot always control what is happening around you. You can, however, control your response to the situation. Don't take responsibility for events beyond your control.
- Coping with fear and vulnerability. Realize that fear and feeling vulnerable come from the perception of danger and not from weakness.
- Avoid comparing yourself with others. Each of you will react in your own way.
- Seek peer or professional counseling if necessary.

## **GET SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND THE DIFFICULT BEHAVIOR**

When confronted with Difficult People, we tend to become so wrapped up in the situation – wishing the individuals were different, feeling angry toward them, and upset at ourselves for being dragged into another unpleasant routine – that we're unable to think through more effective responses. Difficult People are difficult to us because they touch off a series of reactions in ourselves, which always seem to become part of their game.

In order to be able to cope with Difficult People, to break the destructive patterns of behavior, which you fall into with them, you must learn to gain some perspective on their actions, even while they are talking to you. Only by seeing their patterns of behaviour and understanding the source of those patterns will you be able to devise an effective strategy for coping with them.

Your goal is a detached and distanced view of that Difficult Person, while he or she is in the process of being difficult (even shortly thereafter may do). Here are some quotations from those who achieved this perspective with their own problem people: "I'm looking at her through the wrong end of a telescope; every detail clear, but very far away." "I can see him as if he were sitting in a cage with a label over him." "It's just not me he does this to – he's that way with everyone." "I suddenly saw that if I wait for her to stop complaining and start taking some action on her own, I'll wait forever."

To have a distanced perspective of someone does not mean being cold, unfeeling, or nonunderstanding. My own experience is that the opposite is often true, particularly with those I care about, or need, the most. A truism that usually holds here too is: the more you can see others as truly separate from yourself, the more you are able to see them as they are.

