

Tips for Dealing with Difficult Behaviour

Dealing with difficult behaviour can be challenging for both the recipient and the person displaying the behaviour. If you are dealing with a customer's difficult behaviour, you may also find our tips on [handling complaints](#) helpful.

At work we may come across difficult behaviour from our colleagues, our manager, our customers or suppliers. How you manage the difficult behaviour, may therefore be slightly different dependent upon the context of the situation. However, following these ten principles may help you overcome the challenge of dealing with the difficult behaviour:

- 1. Appreciate and adjust:** ask yourself why this person may be behaving this way and is this typical or out of character. If you do wish to respond to the behaviour, adjust your frame of mind to one that is positive and focused on helping them and you move forward.
- 2. Build rapport and empathy:** show some empathy and understanding appropriate to their behaviour and "state" of mind. For example, if someone is angry, you can calm them down by simply lowering your voice. Responding back in anger is only going to inflame the situation!
- 3. Change the environment:** by physically moving away from the current environment, moving chairs, or giving the person space and time can help calm the situation down and dampen the negative or difficult behaviour you are experiencing.
- 4. Defuse the emotion first:** before addressing the root cause of the behaviour. If the person is angry or upset for example, they are unlikely to respond as rationally and calmly as you need them to, to get to the root of the reason for their behaviour.
- 5. Explore the root cause of behaviour:** by asking them open questions such as 'what has lead you to feeling this way?', 'what are your real concerns about this situation?', actively listening and summarising and reflecting back their comments to check out your understanding of what they are telling you, and to help them recognise that you are really listening to them and taking them seriously.
- 6. Focus on the future outcome wanted:** that will address their root concerns and ultimately change their behaviour to a more positive one, checking along the way that you have a clear understanding of the outcome they are seeking. If you are not clear, then asking them 'what would help us move forward' or 'what would make the situation better' for example, will help them consider and convey what they want or need, and helps the person move on from focusing purely on the past or the negative aspects of a situation.
- 7. Gain an agreed solution:** that both you and the person view as a win/win outcome or compromised solution that satisfies the main elements or issues in a constructive way.



KSL Training

Tel: +44 (0) 1635 890450

E-mail: resources@ksl-training.co.uk

Web: <https://www.ksl-training.co.uk>

- 8. Highlight agreement and next steps:** to reaffirm your commitment to addressing the person's concerns or needs and to ensure you have effectively addressed the issue in full. Thank the person for bringing the matter to your attention.
- 9. Inform others where appropriate:** of the situation or issue to ensure no future misunderstanding occurs or problems re-surface. Obviously, where difficult behaviour has occurred due to personal issues, it may not be appropriate to inform or share information with others. If you commit to retaining confidentiality, your credibility in dealing with the difficult behaviour and relationships in general will be at risk as well as the original trust in the relationship.
- 10. Judge your success and learning:** by asking yourself what you have learnt from this situation, what you did well and what you might do differently next time. Every experience in dealing with difficult behaviour will be slightly different, so your ability to adapt to the person and the context of the situation will be vital. There is always something new to be learnt.

Before implementing any of the above strategies for dealing with difficult behaviour at work, we first need to take a step back and review our own perception and thought processes around the behaviour and ask ourselves "why do we find this behaviour difficult?." Being clear of your purpose or reason for changing the behaviour is important, keeping you focused at all times.

As we may have to deal with difficult behaviour in a range of different work situations, you may find some of our other tips helpful:

- [Handling a Customer Complaint](#)
- [Customer Service Training Ideas](#)
- [Tips for Chairing Meetings](#)
- [Tips for Facilitating Groups](#)

About the Author

Written by [Kim Larkins](#).