



## **10 Tips for Leading Difficult or Resistant Employees**

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1. **Identify.** Understand the four primary types of difficult employees.\*

**Aggressors** - Target people who appear weak, but grow more aggressive if they perceive a personal attack.

**Saboteurs** - Deliberately undermine people by omitting pertinent information, gossiping and blaming them for things they didn't do.

**Know It Alls** – They are always right and won't listen to anyone else's point of view.

**Procrastinators** - Stall major decisions as a compromise between being honest and not hurting anyone, hoping the decision will go away.

2. **Understand.** Study the employee's unique traits or habits and motivations for causing trouble.

3. **Assess.** Determine your favorite leadership style (from *The Leader's Window; Beck & Yeagher, 2001*):

Director — Final word; no discussion; inflexible

Problem-Solver — Delegates; takes feedback but expects accountability

Developer — Motivates through incentive; evaluation; mentoring

Delegator — Encourages independence; avoids interfering

4. **Quantify.** Assign a number to each leadership style, 1 for Director, 2 for Problem-Solver, 3 for Developer, 4 for Delegator.

5. **Add it Up.** Run each employee through the formula *Ability + Motivation = Leadership Style* to determine the appropriate approach. Assign a number, 0, 1, or 2, low to high, for ability; and 0,1, or 2, low to high for level of motivation. The resulting sum will determine the appropriate leadership style. (Example: 2 points for ability + 0 points for motivation = leadership style #2 (Problem-solver; Seeks input, but makes final decision)).



6. **Communicate.** Make it clear that different situations will require different leadership styles for each employee. By making it clear to your staff that different situations will require a different leadership style and that you treat all employees fairly, but not equally, you eliminate the difficult employee's favorite tool of dissent — unfair treatment.

7. **Focus.** Think of two or three primary problems with your most difficult employee, then choose one. Your chances of success go up dramatically if you focus on one thing, deliver it as a monologue and eliminate discussion. Avoid small talk.

8. **Stake it Out.** Control the venue so that when you are finished speaking, you can leave or send the person back to work. Calmly reschedule without discussion if the employee brings reinforcements.

9. **Practice.** It may sound silly, but practice the monologue with a trusted colleague prior to the meeting to ensure a confident tone, to eliminate qualifiers or an opening for discussion. Clearly indicate that the meeting is over when you are finished speaking by sending the person back to work.

10. **Refresh.** You owe it to yourself to take lunch with a friend or schedule a break after the confrontation to restore your energy. You will be more productive upon your return to work.

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\*Source: Tymson, C. (2001). *Intervention in School*, v115, n1, p14-17.