

## Dealing With Cranky Co-Workers

Cranky co-workers or bosses can make your work life difficult, but you can take steps to improve your situation.

"One of the hardest things for us to learn in our relationships -- both work and personal -- is that we can operate independently of other people's bad moods, but we have to work at it. Unless you mentally immunize yourself, you can be infected by other people's crankiness," says Leslie Charles, author of "Why Is Everyone So Cranky?"



When you work with cranky people, you can choose to be happy instead of miserable by following this simple formula: Stop, look and listen, then respond.

### Stop

"When something happens, ask yourself if this is a small, medium or large annoyance, and respond accordingly," says Ms. Charles.

Don't respond to your co-worker with sarcasm, ridicule or anger, which will only escalate the problem. And don't take your boss' cranky remarks personally; stress often causes managers and supervisors to act crabby. Also, don't deplete your energy by obsessing about what you should have said.

### Look

Observe when the crankiness occurs. Do you notice it most during a certain time of the day or on a particular day of the week? Does it occur when the person is dealing with a lot of work stress or personal hardship? Take note of when and where the crankiness occurs to identify any pattern, which will make the grouchy behavior more predictable and less threatening.

### Listen

What's the cranky person's real message? Are you in any way part of the problem? Should you change something about your own behavior?

### Respond

Although some people may purposefully use on-the-job crankiness to get their way, others can't help themselves. It's a reflection of their inner turmoil. In either case, don't remain silent.

Here's how to give an assertive, yet compassionate response:

## Step 1. Agree

In a neutral tone of voice, agree with any part of the cranky person's statement that may be true, and ignore the false claims.

For example, if your boss complains you don't care about the company because you turned in your report late, reply with, "You're right, I did turn in my report late last week." Finding some part to agree with will calm the cranky person. Ignore the accusation that you don't care about the company.

## Step 2. Reflect

Next, reflect on how the cranky person might be feeling by saying, "You seem frustrated," "It sounds like you're having a bad day" or "You look like you're under a lot of stress." It will pleasantly surprise the grouch that someone else cares.

## Step 3. Ask

In a neutral tone of voice say, "I don't like to be talked to in that way because it sounds angry and disrespectful. Would you please speak to me in a calmer tone of voice?"

## Consequences

Cranky people often continue behaving badly because their targets remain silent. By responding, you'll make the offender feel somewhat uncomfortable, and most people won't make changes until they experience such discomfort.

## A happier you

No one can guarantee that cranky co-workers or managers will change, because it's not easy to change personality traits. If you take the above steps, however, you'll feel happier because you'll be standing up for yourself in a compassionate, respectful manner.

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