

Are You Working with a Bully? Here's How to Keep Your Cool Without Losing Your Dignity

We all have to work with difficult people. That's a fact of life -- and work. And one person's difficult person isn't necessarily another's. Chances are, you have colleagues whose pace, approach and style makes your job easier -- and others whose way of working makes you cringe.

But no matter what anyone's particular working style preferences are, nobody likes working with a bully. People who yell, interrupt, explode, or otherwise overstep their boundaries in hostile ways aren't just bad for your mood and morale -- they're bad for your mind.

Bullying behavior causes strong negative emotions, which cause massive stress in the brain. When our brains are stressed, we make poor decisions, including reacting immediately rather than responding thoughtfully. This can make a bad situation worse, by responding with anger (which escalates the problem) or deference (which gives the bully tacit permission to continue).

So how you can respond to someone who regularly ignores your needs in pursuit of his own? Calmly, cleanly and consistently.

Here are seven approaches to try:

1. **Use the broken record technique.** Try repeatedly saying "You're interrupting me...You're interrupting me... You're interrupting me" until you break the flow of their tirade.
2. **Notice and name what they are doing using morally neutral language.** "You have been speaking for five minutes" is less accusatory and judgmental than "You haven't shut up once in five minutes" or "You're not letting me talk!"
3. **Try "fogging" to buy some time and distance.** "You might be right" or "You've given me something to think about" or "I hadn't considered that" are all probably true, but **don't make them right or make you wrong.**
4. **Express the impact they are having on you.** Say, "You're raising your voice, and that makes me feel unsafe/uncomfortable/angry. What was your intention?"
5. **Make a direct request.** "Stop interrupting me."
6. **Separate the tone from the content.** Get curious to see if there's any merit in the content that you can address positively, like, "I agree with several of your points, and I'd like to tell you what really resonates with me. In order for me to do that, I need to be able to speak uninterrupted. Would you be willing to do that?"
7. **Go get some advice.** Check in with someone who doesn't experience this person the same way you do. This shouldn't become a gripe session, but a conversation where you can learn some new approaches and strategies you may not have considered.