

3 Pep Talks Everyone Needs Before Talking to a Difficult Person

We all have worked with a difficult person, and for some of us, we're working with a whole bunch of them. But no matter what the behavior is that's tough (or seemingly impossible) to tolerate, we need to develop strategies that allow us to get the work done without blowing up, silently seething, or throwing in the towel.

So, before we talk to anyone else, we need to talk to ourselves. Here are three "pep talks" to give to yourself to help you get into a mindset that will make dealing with a difficult person more productive, or at the very least, less destructive.

Pep Talk 1: Don't Take the Bait

"I will not be triggered. I have all of the resources I need to stay calm, be thoughtful, and not react when someone else is acting out. If I take the bait, I become a part of the problem rather than part of the solution. I will remember to breathe, be mindful of my body language, listen for clarity rather than judgment, and ask for time to think about my responses. And I will keep reminding myself, 'I will not be triggered.'"

Pep Talk 2: Be Compassionate and Curious

"Just like me, this person wants to be happy. Just like me, this person wants to be safe. Just like me, this person wants to be respected. I'm curious about which of these needs -- or others -- aren't getting met. Something or someone taught them to behave this way to try to get what they wanted. I wonder what or who it was? I also know that, as much as I can't stand them, they have family and friends who love them. What do they appreciate about them that I'm not seeing? How can I stretch my perception of them to include even a little bit of what others admire about them? And if I'm willing to believe that people come into our lives for a reason, maybe the reason they are in my life is to teach me something. What can I learn from this?"

Pep Talk 3: Don't Try to Fix It -- Accept It

"There are just some people I'm not going to get along with. This is one of those people. I don't need to fix it -- or fix them. I need to fix my expectations that I'll have friendly, easy and productive relationships with everyone. Trying to fix someone else rarely, if ever, works. My time and energy aren't unlimited resources. I'm going to put them to better use than going down the path of trying to fix someone. Accepting them for who they are, and that this relationship "it is what it is" frees me up to invest in other relationships that matter more, and that have a greater likelihood of payoff."