

## *How might we be contributing to those “difficult” relationships?*

*By Donna Rawady*

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It may be surprising to know that most people who are perceived as difficult are the last to realize it. In my work, I often have the opportunity to hear all sides of a problem or conflict. Based on this experience, I'm confident that nine times out of 10, even in the center of a conflict, people are not calculating, malicious, or untrustworthy. They're simply focused on their **perspective** of the problem and how it affects their experience. Combine that with less-than-savvy communication skills, and the “difficult” label may easily be applied to an individual.

If you're on what you perceive as the receiving end of the “difficult person” label, you may feel misunderstood, mistreated or ignored, and if so, it's natural to become defensive. This defense mechanism becomes a contributing factor to failing working relationships.

With that in mind, when you're either approaching or avoiding someone you deem as difficult, begin by asking yourself a key question: “What contribution might I personally be making to the very dynamics that are upsetting me?”

Consider the following:

- In the best of circumstances, and more importantly in the middle of either overt or covert conflict, assume all parties to the conflict have the best of intentions. Although it may be tough, it's one thing you can do to begin to move the relationship in a better direction.
- Offer your perspective honestly and tactfully. Be respectful and make a genuine effort to guard the self-esteem of all involved in the conflict.
- Check your motive for the conversation. Be sure your motive includes your desire to create a stronger working relationship and a positive business impact.

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