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How to Work with Difficult People

THE FOUR SKILLS YOU NEED TODAY

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How to Work With Difficult People: The 4 Skills You Need Today

We have had enough, and we are pretty sure you have too. We have had thousands of conversations with leaders and folks in organizations who are stuck. They are frustrated with people who are difficult to work with, the ones that create toxicity and roadblocks to getting work done. These difficult people cause valued employees to quit, they stall progress and productivity, they suck our energy and the life out of our workplaces. Enough.


And, we have had enough of platitudes. We notice that people write a lot about the things that you should do to be more productive: trust more, move with speed and agility, get everyone aligned, be transparent and accountable, keep everyone engaged. All proven outcomes to productivity.

But here's the real secret - productivity is about people. Roadblocks show up at work because most of us don't know how to navigate the messy parts of being human and working together. A quick Google search rendered ~900M hits on "how to work with difficult people"! Yet so many are focused on what the outcome should look like without helping you learn how to shift this behavior.

We are on a mission to change that. On the following pages, we offer four fundamental skills that can absolutely make you work more effectively with the people around you and help you become more productive.

Try them on. Don't shy away from what is uncomfortable. See what works for you and how your relationships begin to shift, and then notice the ripple effect. When we are being better humans with one another, we do better work.

**Continue to the four fundamental skills to
help you work with difficult people >>>**



Skill One: 3 Levels of Listening.

In conversation with other people, there is a tendency to stop listening and jump in with our own thoughts. That what's called the "Me Channel" or internal listening. Most of us know this channel pretty well. The reality is, we have three modes for listening, each providing different types of information. As the first, and arguably the most important skill, we offer a taste of the "Love Channel" or focused listening.

Focused listening is just that, a hard focus on the other person. Think about a time when you first met someone and wanted to know as much about them as you could. Remember how closely you listened to what they had to say? Focused listening deepens your understanding of that person and what they are saying.

Try This: When in conversation with someone else, let your curiosity about their experience enthrall you. Listen closely to what they are saying and ask the following types of questions:

What's important about that for you?

Say more...

What else?

Notice: What impact is created when the other person feels really listened to? What insights do you gain about that other person? What was it like for you to hold back sharing your thoughts and make room for them to shine?

Set a goal: Intentionally do this 1x or 3x or 5 x a day. Keep track. You can do this!



The Coaches Training Institute



Skill Two: Shared Agreements.

There is a tendency to dive right into a work task without making time to clarify what each party involved needs to make the relationship work. The result can be: stories are concocted, misunderstandings and hard feelings emerge, tensions and hostility erupt, along with a host of other bad feelings and behaviors. These messy emotions can stall workplace productivity and ruin relationships. But there is hope!

Shared agreements are something you make with one or more people you are working with (could be: a work project, a relationship, a team gathering...you get the idea). Shared agreements clarify what you are working towards and the dos and don'ts of how you want to be together. These are great for direct reports, team members, bosses, cross-functional team, even the dentist and family!

Try This: Practice a shared agreement conversation with one person in your life and see how it goes. You do not have to call it 'shared agreements' you can simply say: "Hey (person), let's talk about what we need from each other to get this work done and feel good about how we're working together." The agreements are created together and mutually agreed upon.

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE ARE THINGS LIKE:

What does success look like?

What do we need from one another to deliver our best work?

What are potential obstacles?

When obstacles are hit, how will we navigate them?

How will I know if you are mad about something?

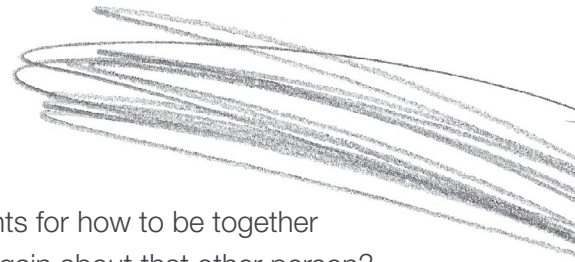
What can I count on you for?

What do you want from this experience?

What do you need from me?

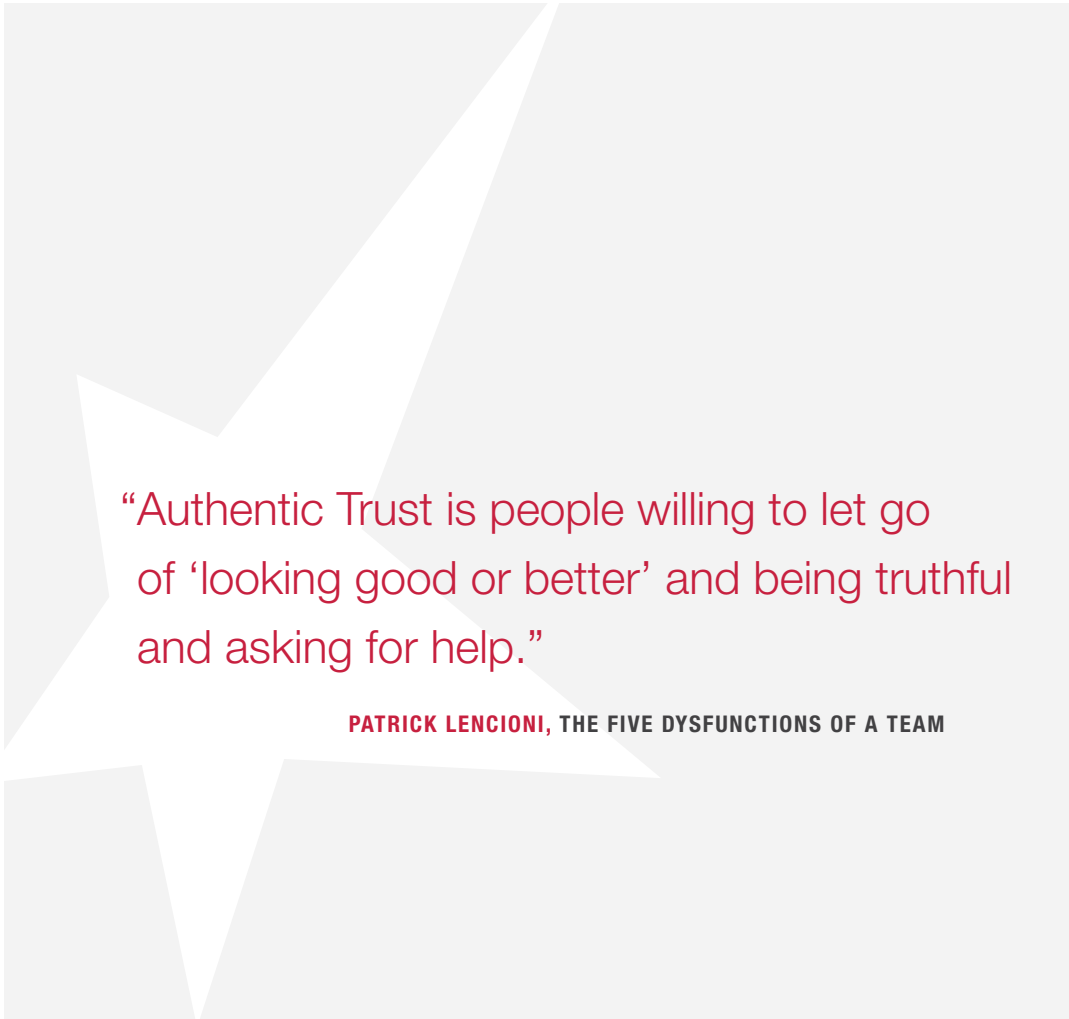
What else?





Notice: What is created when you start with agreements for how to be together vs jumping into doing the work? What insights do you gain about that other person? How is this helpful? What was it like for you to put your needs out there? What, if anything did you hold back and what was that all about?

Practice and Refine: Write down your shared agreements. Keep them visible, for example post them at the top of agendas, on a sticky note or poster board in your office. Refer to them when you hit roadblocks, they create a safe way to address a potential conflict. Set a cadence, once a month or so to revisit them. If circumstances change, typically so do your agreements. Reflect on your agreements when debriefing the outcome of the project, how were they helpful, or not? Iterate for next time.

A large, stylized white star graphic is centered on the page, set against a light grey background. The star has a jagged, hand-drawn appearance with several points. The text is placed within the central negative space of the star.

“Authentic Trust is people willing to let go of ‘looking good or better’ and being truthful and asking for help.”

PATRICK LENCIONI, THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM



Skill Three: Curiosity & Powerful Questions.

In our fast-paced world it is so easy to get caught up in the habit of telling people what to do and how they should feel. It can seem easier to direct and control activity. But what is left in the wake is other people feeling diminished, unseen, undervalued, judged wrong or unworthy. Curiosity is the antidote to judgement. This one basic skill can transform your relationships with others, helping them feel valued and seen. All while giving you deeper insights into them.

Try this: Chose one person to get curious about. This might be someone you are silently (or not) judging their behavior or ways of doing things. Approach your interaction from the point-of-view that they know more about the topic than you do! Start to get curious about them using powerful questions. These are short open-ended questions, seven words or less; they start with what or how. Powerful questions express curiosity and open-up insights for you and for others. Be creative with your questions.

ASK POWERFUL QUESTIONS LIKE:

What's important about that?

What is the outcome you want?

How does this help you?

How are you making decisions?

How will you know?

What are your criteria for success?

What might be missing?

*What are you seeing
(that I might not be seeing)?*

Notice: What are you having to let go of? How does that serve you and this relationship? What insights do you gain about that other person? What is created when you approach from a place of curiosity rather than judgement?

Set a goal: Start practicing curiosity and powerful questions with one person. Each week consciously add in one more person until this becomes a way of being with others.





Skill Four: Acknowledgement.

More than anything, people want to be seen for the person they truly are. For some, it is hard to claim qualities that make them the good human they are. Hearing that others see and value qualities in us, nourishes and validates us. Acknowledgements do just that.

Try This: Find one person to acknowledge – acknowledge a quality they have, that you see in them, not what they are doing. Think about the most important thing you want that person to know, the behavior you want to reinforce, and lead with that.

DON'T OVER THINK THIS. SPEAK FROM YOUR HEART, NOT FROM YOUR HEAD.

You are so diligent in how you stay focused to solve a problem.

You are so enthusiastic about your team!

You demonstrated real courage to take that on and get it done.

The way you included others and got them excited was infectious!”

You have a calming way of talking to others so what is unfamiliar doesn't seem so hard to do.

Notice: What do you notice about acknowledging how a person is being instead of what they are doing? What's the impact been on folks you have acknowledged? What do you notice about how people receive an acknowledgement? Has anything shifted in how you think about others?

Set a Goal: Find one person a day to acknowledge. Make it real.





Pro tips:

You will not master these the first time you try them. Skills to Be Human and Do Better Work are a muscle that takes building. Just like learning anything, you get better the more you put them into practice. Maybe take them one at a time instead of all at once.

Learning new things is hard. You will try some things and they might not have the affect you want or it might feel awkward. When that happens pause and ponder: was it timing, or readiness of the people involved, or the way it was approached? Were you tired and not really ready to put the energy needed to work on this?

Things can get in the way of your intended impact. When that happens, take responsibility for it. Suspend judgment of yourself and others. Practice curiosity with yourself and others to better understand what happened, and how to make it better.

We get better together. Choose three people, get them to learn and practice these skills with you. See what happens when you are all practicing different skills with one another – involve others – exchange learning. And watch your impact spread. Notice what happens to others in your environment, before long, they will be wanting to learn how to ‘be a good human and do better work’ from you!

Our mission is to bring more humanity to the workplace so together we can change the world of work. We provide straight-forward practical techniques that shift behavior to be a good human and do better work allowing you and your organization to thrive. Our new book, ***Be Human. Do Better Work***, will be available in early 2021.

If we have ignited your interest, please join us [here](#).



Thanks,

Kate and Deb





“As humans and as leaders we have an infinite ability to grow, to be and to become more.”

KEVIN CASHMAN, LEADERSHIP ON THE INSIDE OUT