

people

► Payne Hicks Beach has promoted two lawyers to its partnership. Fiona Brown joins the family group and Jonathan Gatward joins the company and commercial group.

► Cheshire firm Hillyer McKeown has promoted commercial and corporate specialist Steve Harvey to its partnership. Harvey joined Hillyer McKeown three years ago.

► Cartwright King has appointed Richard Boucher as a partner in its mental health department. Boucher joined Cartwright King in 2003 from Peterborough firm Hunt and Coombes.

► Farrer & Co has promoted Serena Hedley-Dent to the partnership. Hedley-Dent advises sports governing bodies on regulatory and commercial matters. Meanwhile, Robert Datnow is joining as a partner from the British Olympic Association, where he was head of legal.

► Eversheds has hired a new partner for its real estate practice. Oliver Emanuel was a senior associate at Clifford Chance, where he had been for five years.

in brief

► Jersey firm Sinels, in conjunction with Caversham Fiduciary Services, held a seminar on offshore trusts on 20 May at Lincoln's Inn. The aim of the seminar was to introduce private client solicitors to Jersey trusts. Advocate Philip Sinel highlighted the security involved in local trusts and defended trusts from attack by beneficiaries or outsiders.

► The Chartered Institute of Taxation (CIOT) is holding a panel debate on taxation on Tuesday 13 September 2005. The panel will be chaired by John Whiting, partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers and former president of the CIOT.

The disposition deposition

Where there's people, there's problems. Rachel Brushfield explains how to beat personality clashes



BY NATURE, lawyers tend to have sharp and analytical minds. They also generally take a challenging and competitive approach to work, especially litigation lawyers. This 'picking holes' style is a great asset when applied to case work, but if you are personally on the receiving end of what can be very extreme, dogmatic, argumentative and even self-righteous behaviour, this fighting mentality can be downright difficult to deal with. You can end up feeling uneasy and on edge all the time. Or stressed and even ill. It may reach the point where you dread going to work.

So what causes 'difficult' behaviour? It can simply be because someone has different values and beliefs from your own, such as very direct communication rather than subtle, as these drive both behaviour and attitudes. More problematic behaviour – for example manipulative, two-faced, cutting, condescending, sarcastic or aggressive – feels personal and undermining.

Sometimes you can minimise your interaction with a difficult colleague, but when they are your boss or a managing partner it is not so easy. Indeed, it can become all-consuming and you can become stressed just by thinking about them. You may find yourself talking about the problem constantly and even consider leaving, despite all your hard work and love for your job.

So how should you deal with a difficult person? First, remember that often they are experiencing emotions that they do not know how to deal with and hence you become the unwilling recipient. This is called projection or transference. It is not personal to you, you just happen to be on the receiving end. Neither our upbringing nor law school teaches us how to deal with uncomfortable emotions, so we do what is easiest and project them onto someone else so they are not burdening us any more.

Second, it is key to separate the behaviour from the person, as people usually try to do the best they can in life. Often, beneath a difficult person's behaviour is insecurity and low self-esteem.

Third, remember that people always do things for a reason, so even if a behaviour feels widely irrational or inappropriate to you, there may be a reason for their behaviour, such as attention-seeking or protecting their position as they feel vulnerable.

Here are 10 tips to help you handle difficult people:

1. Identify what it is that makes someone's behaviour difficult for you.
2. Identify and build on any common ground that you share with them.
3. Do not make assumptions and jump to conclusions; ask them clarifying and empathic questions, eg: "Please can you explain what you mean so I understand you better?"
4. Try using the neuro-linguistic programming tool – the 'meta-mirror' is very effective at identifying what to do about a difficult situation.
5. Notice how they make you feel. Jotting down notes and observations can help.
6. Create a ridiculous image of them using your imagination, so that they seem less intimidating.
7. Build a rapport with them by matching their body language, words, tone and energy.
8. Ask the advice of people you trust or get coaching to identify actions that will lead to positive change so you feel more empowered.
9. When speaking with them, disassociate and imagine that you are observing yourself, your emotions and them from a distance.
10. Remember that you always have choice.

Dealing with a difficult colleague can give you a real headache and be very challenging, but even small breakthroughs can be one of the most empowering things that you can experience.

Rachel Brushfield is the director of Energise Brand Communications

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