

Three Ways to Create Bad Relationships at Work (and How to Fix Them)

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You may have heard the phrase, “If it wasn’t for the people, work would be great.” Although many point to their peers and coworkers as providing a strong sense of camaraderie and meaning in the workplace, often the biggest complaints are aimed at peers and coworkers. In fact, usually when someone resigns from a company, it is as a result of interpersonal issues in the workplace. Why is it that some of these relationships can go so well and be so rewarding while others can be so frustrating and destructive?

When considering how people interact with each other in the workplace, there are four main approaches people can take, most of which only serve to create relational problems. The approaches are as follows:

1. **Passive** – This approach is friendly and wants to be liked. They also desperately want to avoid conflict. As a result, they are generally seen as team players and flexible, but can also be doormats to people who are prone to taking advantage of other people’s good will. There are times when this approach may be appropriate, but if you’re always this way, you’ll find that more and more people will cross your boundaries.
2. **Passive-Aggressive** – Often, a person using this approach is upset about something or has been hurt by someone, but doesn’t address the issue head on. They avoid the primary conflict and vent their frustrations by ‘poking’ people, but in ways that makes it difficult to trace the bad behavior back to them. Although secretly getting back at those who have made you mad may feel satisfying, it only leads to more frustration and is always an ineffective way of managing relationships.
3. **Aggressive** – This approach is characterized by a desire to dominate and to do so in a hostile manner. Unfortunately, this behavior is often rewarded with the aggressive person getting what they want (a bully getting someone else’s lunch money), but it only breeds hostility toward the aggressor and destroys the desire to work with this person. This is also an ineffective way of managing relationships.
4. **Assertive** – This approach is characterized by respect for your own boundaries as well as the boundaries of others. Although conflict might feel uncomfortable, this person is willing to address it and to do so in a way that doesn’t leave the other person feeling violated or demeaned. This is a

position of respect and influence and is the healthiest approach.

Being assertive can sometimes be the hardest approach to take, because it doesn't necessarily fit with what you want to do. If your boss humiliates you in a large meeting, you may want to find a hole and hide (Passive). After the meeting, you may feel like going to all your peers and tearing down your boss for what he or she did (Passive-Aggressive). You may also fantasize about what you should have said in the meeting that would have knocked your boss down a peg or two (Aggressive). Staying centered and doing the right thing can be challenging, but it is always the healthy thing to do.

To learn more about how to create healthy interactions in the workplace, please download our [free eBook](#) called "[Managing Conflict](#)." Tell us what you think on our [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) page, and feel free to share this post.