

# Dealing with Difficult People

Difficult people are everywhere! If you've been a steward or activist for any length of time, you've certainly dealt with them. These can be people who constantly attack the steward and the union over one issue or another, or demand the impossible - and then get angry when the impossible can't be made to happen. And then there are the whiners - always complaining and nagging for help, but never doing anything themselves.

What can you do about it? A good start would be to try to understand why members sometimes act in these difficult ways. You've seen them all at one time or another:

1. Members with legitimate complaints about the union or the steward.
2. Members who demand 'service' in exchange for their dues, because they view the union like an insurance company or other service.
3. Members who seem to cause difficulty in everything they do, perhaps for psychological reasons.

They're not all #3s! Listen to them so you can really understand where they're coming from. Keep in mind your duty of fair representation. If they have legitimate complaints, look for constructive ways to help. If they are 'service minded,' scolding and lectures won't work. Show them that they are the union by the way you do your job. Keep them informed, talk to them one-on-one.

And that #3 person? Don't get sucked into his problems! Don't argue or get into long discussions with her! It almost always gets you nowhere. Instead, make a clear statement that doesn't engage the complainer. Eventually, they will see that they can't get you to "wrestle" with them and they will move on.

Here is some food for thought for those #3s.

## Four Types of Difficult People

These are just a few of the types you might come into contact with...

**Sherman Tanks - people that bully and push you around**

**Snipers - people that strike with negative remarks**

**Complainer - whines and gripes about everything**

**Know-it-All - Loves to tell you facts and figures and show you they are always right**

See the next page for characteristics and coping skills you can use

## **Sherman Tanks - people that bully and push you around**

### Characteristics

Attack you

Intimidate you

Base decisions on facts of the moment

Get impatient with people of  
different opinions

### Coping Skills

Stand up to the person

"I disagree with you"

"Sounds like our facts don't fit"

Don't get into an argument

Call the person by name

Don't allow the person to interrupt

Be ready to be friendly after standing up  
to them

## **Snipers - people that strike with negative remarks**

### Characteristics

Very strong sense of how  
others should act and think

Have to prove they are right

Maintain cover behind victim

Take potshots at others

### Coping Skills

Deal with them alone

Explain situation and end with question

"Did you mean it that way?"

"Deal with every snipe

Be prepared for plays

"Can't you take a joke?"

Don't let the person get away with it

## **Complainer - whines and gripes about everything**

### Characteristics

Sentences filled with 'ands' and 'buts'

Uses a whiny voice

Feel like they have little control

Appear to be blameless, innocent,  
and morally perfect

### Coping Skills

Listen actively

Don't agree with them

Acknowledge that you understand

Don't apologize

Paraphrase what they say

Get them to problem-solving mode by  
asking specific questions

"When did you first notice the problem?"

Give simple task like putting complaints  
in writing

Involve them in solving problem

## **Know-it-All - Loves to tell you facts and figures and show you they are always right**

### Characteristics

Know that they have THE right answer

Are insulted if you try to talk to them

Powerful - feel they don't need others

### Coping Skills

Get them to consider alternative views

Avoid direct challenges

Listen carefully

Paraphrase

If you have objections, ask them

Ask questions

They often discover their own errors