Dealing with Annoying Co-workers

Debra Cannarella, High Performing Systems, Inc.

Debra Cannarella
Director of Operations

Link with Debra on LinkedIn

Follow High Performing Systems on Twitter

"Raising awareness about yourself and others will help you recognize that there isn't a 'right' or 'wrong' interpersonal style."

High Performing Systems, Inc.

706-769-5836 • www.hpsys.com

People are different, and we all bring something unique to the workplace. If we can capitalize on our strengths as a team, the whole organization can benefit. Sometimes, though, differences become a hindrance rather than a help. We have all had an experience with someone who didn't quite click well with us. An annoying co-worker can drain the energy from the team and impact productivity and camaraderie. Wouldn't it be great to have a strategy to deal with those irritating colleagues? Continue reading below for some common workplace annoyances and techniques you may try to eliminate—or at least reduce—the effects from interpersonal clashes.

Safeguard Optimism: Derailing Negative Nancy

Someone has a great idea for a new product offering or approach, and the team is exploring the possibility in a brainstorming meeting. It's going well, and the team is gaining enthusiasm and momentum. The team's optimism is high. Then Nancy pipes up about all the work that the new product would require and to remind the team of the last idea that didn't work well. Nothing halts the energy of brainstorming like a Negative Nancy. When a negative person speaks up, the rest of the team can feel the momentum grind to a halt.

How can the team safeguard optimism? Start by setting ground rules at the start of exploratory meetings. If the session is truly a brainstorming meeting, no one should be allowed to criticize or critique. Don't let anyone disrupt the positive flow of ideas until the brainstorming is complete. Even better, reserve analysis and critique for a separate meeting altogether. If the team members hold each other accountable and follow the simple ground rules, the impact from Negative Nancy will be reduced.

Overcome Workstyle Differences: Aloof Alan and Overwhelming Olivia

On larger-sized teams, it's easy to identify a continuum of how inclusive and interactive people tend to be. Some people prefer an independent work style and rarely engage with their co-workers, like Aloof Alan. Other people want to work together so much that they have difficulty completing tasks without checking in with the team. These people want continuous input, reassurance and support, like Overwhelming Olivia. Many team members are somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. In reality, it doesn't take a significant difference in interpersonal style to feel that some people are just not a good "fit" on a team.

A strategy for dealing with differences in work style is first to understand yourself and others better. By completing assessments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® instrument, the EQ-i 2.0® or the Element B™, team members can identify their natural inclination toward how much interaction they prefer on a team. Raising awareness about yourself and others will help you recognize that there isn't a "right" or "wrong" interpersonal style. If we know what works best for everyone, we can try to establish a frequency of meetings that allows Alan to have some downtime for himself while keeping Olivia in the loop with enough collaboration to share ideas and discuss with others.

Find Balance: Assertive Alice and Quiet Quinton

Like the example of interpersonal work style described above, people fall on a continuum when it comes to how much assertiveness they tend to exhibit. Some people are quick to speak up and share their thoughts and opinions, like Assertive Alice. Other people are

reserved, rarely contributing to the discussion, like Quiet Quinton. If Alice takes over the conversation, other team members may feel stifled, and their input may be missed. If Quinton doesn't speak up, valuable insights or a different perspective on a project may go unspoken.

How can a team balance the level of contribution from its members? In extreme examples where Alice might completely take over a meeting, she may need to limit herself in how much she can speak up by keeping a tally of how often she talks in a meeting. When she's reached her quota, she must stop. By being intentional and practicing impulse control, she can prioritize what she shares. But what about Quinton? If he leaves meetings disappointed that he didn't speak up more, perhaps he can ask a trusted colleague to help him. If the meeting is half over and Quinton hasn't contributed yet, his colleague can encourage him to join the discussion by asking for his thoughts on the issue. Just like Alice, Quinton might also keep a tally, but his checklist can be used to track a minimum number of times to talk, while Alice is holding herself to a maximum.

Next Steps: Build Better Teams

Whether your co-workers are annoying due to differences in optimism, preferred work style, assertiveness or something else, the keys to team success are awareness and flexibility. Understanding yourself and others provides a foundation for recognizing and appreciating the differences we all bring to the conference table. Being willing to adjust to accommodate the team will bring out the best in everyone. Coaching, training and assessments are great ways to help team members increase awareness and implement these and other strategies.

Keep in mind, also, that from someone else's perspective, *you* might be the annoying co-worker! The strategies described above can help you, too. Self-reflection and feedback from others are great first steps to identify areas that you might want to adjust. Without changing the real you, even small modifications to your interpersonal style, assertiveness level and optimism can help you get along better with your team.

Once we realize that differences are valuable to the team, we can try to leverage our individual strengths for the benefit of all. When we do, we will worry less about changing what we perceive to be annoying in others. Instead, we will be allowing everyone to shine by contributing those things that are unique to each person and valuable to the whole team.

About the Author
Debra Cannarella is the Director of Operations at High Performing Systems, Inc. (HPS), a consulting company that provides assessments, consulting and training solutions to help organizations excel. HPS conducts assessments of leadership potential and provides individual, leader and executive coaching to clients.

Contact Debra by email at debra@hpsys.com.

High Performing Systems, Inc.

706-769-5836 • www.hpsys.com

Your Assessment Toolbox
Click on the icons to learn more about these development resources.

These tools are also available as part of HPS certifications and training.

Contact HPS to Learn More About Assessments, Coaching & Certification
Visit HPS online at **www.hpsys.com** *or call* **800.535.8445.**