

Are You Difficult? ... It's a Matter of Perspective

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While most people don't describe themselves as "difficult" (although some actually find pleasure in doing so!) difficult behavior can nonetheless come from anyone, anytime, anywhere; we all have the capacity to express it. What constitutes difficult or prickly behavior is very subjective, shaped by our personal perceptions. We each define individually what annoys or frustrates us; it's our own perception as to what causes our negative reaction.

For instance, a person may irritate us incessantly, while someone else gets along with him just fine. Likewise, we may have an easy going relationship with someone else's Prickly Person. It's a matter of perspective that determines what behaviors we consider to be difficult, and how well we manage them when they surface. Like beauty, a Prickly Person is in the eye of the beholder. A person becomes prickly to us when they push one or more of our buttons, derail our desires, put up barriers to our goals, or have agendas different from our own.

It's an interesting revelation that everyone is eventually somebody's "Prickly Person." "Who, me?" you might ask. Probably so. Even if you typically go out of your way to get along and have excellent interpersonal skills, some situations arise that simply get the best of you and bring out a bit of the beast, transforming you into someone else's thorn!

We usually don't see ourselves as the problem, or understand how we might be contributing or causing the difficulty. When we get angry and frustrated, our emotions can provoke our own prickly behaviors, which irritate others. Our behaviors might actually be triggering reactions in others, who see us as the troublemakers.

To avoid being a thorn, it's valuable to regularly monitor how people respond to you. Do they appear intimidated? Do they avoid talking to you? Do you get a regular stream of defensive reactions? Do people stop talking when you're around? These are often telltale signs signaling their discomfort and the desire to avoid contact with you. Some thorny behaviors that quickly earn the label of "difficult" include being easily riled, argumentative, impatient, unreliable, critical, inattentive, harassing, and verbally abusive, as well as behaviors such as interrupting others,

spending more time talking than listening, and blaming others.

Keep in mind that prickly behavior can range from wild to mild and all the way to idle, since another annoying variation is more mild-mannered but nonetheless irritating: being lazy or slow to respond. If an honest self-assessment reveals that you have any of these behaviors, they can be disruptive to building and sustaining productive relationships.

If people aren't connecting with us, our behavior may be making connection difficult. People judge us by what they see and believe to be true about us—but their perceptions can change. When we change what we say and what we do, they notice the difference and respond to us differently as a result. With getting along as a goal, taking personal responsibility for our connections is critical to our success—as is making any necessary behavior modifications to enhance the quality and quantity of our relationships.

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