

PEOPLE PROBLEMS!

by Eve Ash

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH MANIPULATIVE PEOPLE?

Have you ever worked with someone that you would classify as manipulative? Someone who is always late and has a bundle of excuses and then makes you feel bad. Maybe it was a pushy demanding person expecting you to agree to something you know you cannot provide. It may happen to you often, leaving you feeling annoyed and even used. Or you may be reading this and realise that you are the kind of person that **OFTEN MANIPULATES OTHERS** - through habit. Either way – it is not a healthy way to develop constructive work relationships.

Manipulative people can be difficult to work with, as they have the ability to influence you or even exploit you. Sometimes the manipulation may not be obvious, so subtle in fact that the person being manipulated is not aware of what is happening.

Manipulators may be customers, co-workers, contractors, suppliers, managers, staff - anyone. What is happening is a kind of game where they are pressing your 'buttons' - playing on an emotional weakness. And sadly a lack of self-awareness can put you right in the perfect place to be manipulated. So in order to deal with a manipulator the first step is to become more **SELF-AWARE** that you are the kind of person that gets manipulated! Being aware of it lessens its power.

What are some strategies for handling manipulation?

IGNORE - good to use when you are a victim e.g. a manager who makes you feel guilty if you don't stay late to do extra work. They stay late so why shouldn't you? Sadly women and rescuer types fall for this one all too easily. Even sadder - once the manipulator sees this working, the tactic will be used again and again. So just don't respond. Ignore the manipulative comments.

SAYING NO - The manipulative person will not take no for an answer. They may raise their voice, use a threatening

tone and body language, and persist e.g. a difficult customer who wears you down, insists on getting something you can't provide. This will have a big impact on a person who lacks experience, lacks confidence, and especially someone who hates conflict and tries to avoid any conflict situation. So it becomes easier to say yes than fight. So this is where you have to **LEARN TO SAY NO!** Maybe say you understand why they are asking - **BUT THE ANSWER IS NO!** Repeat it and **DO NOT** give in.

CONFRONTING THE PROBLEM -

Some manipulators use charm, flattery, wit and confidence to make you feel valued, important and accepted - and it works well with those with self-esteem issues. For example, someone who never delivers on time or to the agreed standard, but they sweet talk, and 'seduce' you so it becomes difficult to get angry with them. Here you need to focus on the problem you are facing with the person - and ignore the 'seductive behaviour, flattery and cute excuses'. They have a way of making you feel good about yourself. Somehow there is a threat that they will withdraw this flattery... or because they make you feel so good with their sweet talk, you must do special favours or make special allowances. Zoom in on the underlying problem and tell them:

1. What specifically is wrong?, e.g. late, poor quality, broken promises
2. Why it is a problem?
3. How it makes you feel?
4. What you expect in the future.

COUNTER MANIPULATE - Some people leverage the reciprocity urge by doing lots of easy 'favours', then expecting things (usually more significant) in return, e.g. a person who gives 'gifts' then expects you to do favours for them. Then if you don't respond they might say: "Look what I do for you, surely you can do this one small thing for me". Don't allow an emotional debt to build. Don't accept offerings where there may be a coupled 'hidden' request. Or joke and say: "I hope by me taking this great book you

are not now expecting ME to go and..." Or give them a gift - a nice piece of chocolate cake - something that is easy and negates the debt!

CONVINCE WITH COALITION AND EXPERT KNOWLEDGE -

What about the smooth talker, the bulldozer or stubborn resistant type, e.g. the person who uses multiple arguments to resist changes that you as a manager are trying to implement in your team, or the person who can sell anything to anyone? This is where you can use facts, knowledge and expertise to avoid getting sucked in. Build a coalition of those that agree with you, who know what is best, people you can refer to and have some ready reference expertise - facts, research, opinion and experts to refer to.

Remember the first step is to recognise you may be someone who gets manipulated in certain circumstances.



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