



## Smart Strategies Solutions for Workplace Challenges

Issue #4  
June - July 2008  
Double Issue!

### Greetings!

A few astute readers noticed there was no June issue. However, here at Krieger Solutions our goal is to never miss a commitment... so we decided to not have a June issue, but to have a special double June-July issue!

This was based on the facts that these two months are the only months with 4 letters in the name, both starting with "J", and they are consecutive months to boot! (Also, we were swamped in June.)

In this issue we address some strategies for dealing with difficult people. We believe in tried and true approaches and start with a suggestion from the Bible and then one from Abe Lincoln... then we fast forward to some more recent ideas. We have two articles on this. (It's a double issue after all!)

Hope you enjoy!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Alan'.

Alan Krieger



**Alan Krieger**  
President  
Krieger Solutions,  
LLC

Secrets to Working Well With  
Difficult People

A little humor -  
welcome to  
Summer!

1. A group of adults was discussing the Ten Commandments. After exploring the commandment to 'honor thy Father and thy Mother', one person asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat people we work with?" Without missing a beat one person answered, "Thou shall not kill." [Editor's note: That's a good start, but it tells us what *not* to do; we need to know what we *can* do. For suggestions see our two articles below on negotiations and a positive approach.]

2. Is it possible to have a **civil** war?

At one point during the Civil War, Lincoln publicly referred to the Southerners as misguided human beings. An elderly lady chastised him for talking about the enemy in such kind terms when he should be thinking of destroying them. "Why, madam," said Lincoln, "do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" [Editor's note: Lincoln was a great man. So how do we lesser beings do this? See our article on negotiations below.]

## Getting Along with Co-workers Using Negotiation Tools

*Following Lincoln's lead can be very challenging. How do you make your enemies your friends?*

Start by practicing win-win negotiation. The key premise here is that most difficult people have underlying **interests** that are legitimate. These interests are ones you can support. The difficult person's stated **positions** are oppositional and not supportable. So we need to separate these out. (For more on [positions and interest](#), [see my article](#) or read [Getting to Yes](#) by Roger Fisher and William Ury)

*Warning! The following will strike many of you as unreasonable. As you read this, try to think of other realistic alternatives. If you come up with them, send me an email. For the rest of you, this is as good as it gets.*

For example:

A difficult person who works next to you talks to you all day and frequently interrupts your work. This person may be lonely and insecure. (Not your problem to fix, you are not their therapist, but we do want to try to build a connection with them to keep things running smoothly at work.) Their **interests** may be that they want to be part of a team, feel a sense of camaraderie and be accepted by others. These are legitimate interests that we can support (at least in principle).

Their difficult **behavior** is not supportable. You can address this by focusing on both of your **interests** and see if you can find a way to meet their needs in a way that does not create constant stress and interruptions for you. Your interests area comfortable work place and

**Gardening Rule:**  
When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.

**Thought for the day:**  
If you ate both pasta and antipasto, would you still be hungry?

### In This Issue

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*We offer training, leadership coaching, team building and organizational consulting services.*

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quiet time to focus on your work. Their interests are connecting with co-workers.

Let them know that you need quiet to concentrate on your work and ask them if they can help you with that by keeping their conversations with you to break time. (If you first make an effort to engage positively with the talker during the day, at times convenient to you, they will be more inclined to work with you on limiting noise and interruptions.)

Another example:

A difficult person who is rude or offensive is often frustrated and angry at the world. (Again, not your problem to fix, you are not their therapist, but we do want to try to build a connection with them.) Try to get to know them a bit when they are between rude moments (that happens!). Make an effort to ask them for input or assistance and be appreciative when they give it. Be available to help them when they need it. If you know their TEAM style, try to adjust your conversation to that style. (Make sure you're not misreading a high "T" who, while acting in a way that seems rude, may in fact have no rude intentions!)

In any conflict, the other person has some interests: wanting to be treated more fairly; wanting influence, respect, appreciation, or autonomy. Your job is to listen carefully for the *interests* behind the positions. The positions lead to conflict, the interests lead to a common foundation from which you can work together to solve the conflict or better yet, prevent it.

**Pollyanna? Naïve? Or Realistic?** Is it fair to have to work so hard to get along with a difficult person? Of course not, but who said life is fair! It would be great if they would change or if the boss held them accountable, but too often as co-workers we're left to deal with this on our own and I don't see any other workable strategies. **Let me know what you think! Email me at [alan@krsol.com](mailto:alan@krsol.com) and I'll compile and share your responses.**

## Make it Positive!! Part II

Here's another tip on working with difficult people and turning enemies into friends.

Last issue we talked about being more positive in the workplace instead of complaining. (Did you try it? Any success? Let me know!) Here's another look at taking a positive slant when you feel like criticizing someone. This is especially important for supervisors (also works for parents, partners, or anyone trying to get someone else to change their behavior).

When you see someone doing something wrong - time and attendance, errors, poor quality work, poor quality interactions with customers/co-workers, etc. - instead of pointing out what they are

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**Survey Question of the Month:**

doing wrong, point out what you'd like them to be doing instead.

So instead of: "Sue, you've been late 4 times this week." Try: "Sue it's real important that you get here on time every day. Your co-workers count on you to pick up your work right at the start of the day."

Instead of: "Tom, your reports are very inaccurate and difficult to read." Try: "Tom, when you draft a report, I'd like you to proof read the data several times to make sure you've presented it accurately. I'd also like you to think about your readers who will be in a hurry and have less background than you do. Please try to organize the report to make it easy for these readers to skim through it and pick up the key points. Use bullets, and bold fonts to highlight the key points and provide an introduction that outlines the structure of the report."

You'll notice that the positive version takes more words and requires more precision. You've got to invest if you want to see change!

Those of you with kids at home, instead of "Johnny your room is a mess." Try: "Johnny, I'd really like you to pick your clothes up off the floor and put the clean ones in the drawers and the dirty ones in the laundry basket." (Don't expect miracles, but stick with it and see what happens.)

Let us know what you think and what your strategies are!

## Special Summer Offer!

Send us your stories about difficult people and what you've tried to do to work with them, and we'll send you (at no cost) some customized tips on new strategies to try.

What's the catch? Our Dealing with Difficult People workshop is our most popular and we're always looking for good stories to add to our collection. (Any stories you send that we use will be completely disguised and synthesized with other stories.)

If you don't want us to use your story, but just want some free advice, let us know that and we'll still give you the free advice.

Send your stories to me at: [alan@krsol.com](mailto:alan@krsol.com)

I've been getting requests to provide training for supervisors on working with different generations - Boomers, X'ers, Millennials. I've done some reading and been to a few presentations, and I don't buy it.

I understand there are some differences in how each generation was brought up, but what the "experts" say about Millennials now, sounds a lot like what they said about me when I was a young Boomer.

I've found that the differences the "experts" cite are often contradictory or trivial. When they do cite a significant difference, I believe it's usually more attributable to stage of life / age differences.

For example - "Millennials" are said to live in the moment, not stay at any job for long, and question everything. Take away the generation slant and I think this fits for young people of all generations. They have lots of enthusiasm and creativity. They are used to the more

casual environment of school where accountability is lower and there is usually more flexibility. Young people also are "feeling their oats" (where did that expression come from?) and have a tendency to question/challenge authority and experiment with different jobs. The work place can be a shock to them and they don't always respond positively.

(Those of you who studied Erik Erikson - youth are at the stage of Dependence vs Independence and their job is to become independent, i.e. challenge authority.)

So here's the question:  
Do supervisors need to understand each generation's characteristics to be effective as a supervisor...OR..are the generational generalizations red herrings, and the real issue is that supervisors need to know how to supervise workers who are at different stages of life?

[Send me your thoughts](#) and I'll summarize and share the results next issue.

If you want to read more of my rants on this, check out my [article about the Generations](#) .

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