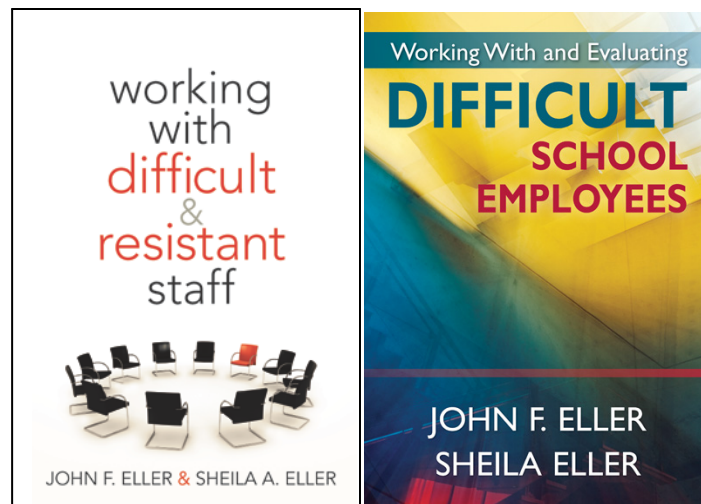


Dealing with Difficult and Resistant Teachers: Working with Marginal and Deficient Staff Members



Presented by:

Sheila Eller

&

John Eller

Seller3600@aol.com

jellerthree@aol.com

651-247-8305

Workshop material from the book, *Working with and Evaluating Difficult School Employees*, (2010) (Corwin Press) and *Working with Difficult and Resistant Staff* (2011) (Solution Tree Press) unless otherwise noted.

Your Skills and Readiness in Dealing with a Difficult Situation or Person

1. An understanding of the job description or performance expectations for the employee you are targeting

2. Ability to accurately describe deficit in performance

3. Ability to confront employee about performance

4. Skill in addressing issue while staying in track

5. Ability to design a difficult conference with the employee

6. Ability to work under pressure and stay the course to the final outcome

7. Ability to design an improvement plan

8. Ability to design and implement a follow-up plan for the employee

Readiness Self-Assessment Template

Confronting employee deficiencies requires a set of sound skills. Use the following template to help you assess your skills in this area. Use the results to help you decide how to move forward on your particular situation and to develop a professional growth plan to help you gain the necessary skills to feel competent in moving forward in your work with this employee.

Skill Required to Deal with Employee	Your Level of Skill in this Area (1-10; 1=Very Limited, 5=Somewhat Prepared, 10=Very Prepared)	Evidence for Rating	Strategy or Resource for Addressing Skill Limitation
Ability to accurately describe deficit in performance	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
Ability to confront employee about performance	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
Skill in addressing issue while staying in track	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
Ability to design a difficult conference with the employee	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
Ability to work under pressure and stay the course to the final outcome	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
Ability to design an improvement plan	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
Ability to design and implement a follow-up plan for the employment plan	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		

From Eller & Eller, 2010

PERFORMANCE AREA: Instruction

	N/A	Unsat.	Dev.	Prof.	Exemp.
Specification 1: Communicating Clearly and Accurately Elements: Directions and Procedures Oral and Written Language					
Specification 2: Using Questioning & Discussion Techniques Elements: Quality of Questions Discussions Techniques Student Participation					
Specification 3: Engaging Students in Learning Elements: Representation of Content Activities and Assignments Grouping of Students Instructional Materials and Resources Structure and Pacing					
Specification 4: Providing Feedback to Students Elements: Quality: Accurate, Substantive, Constructive, and Specific Timeliness					
Specification 5: Demonstrating Flexibility & Responsiveness Elements: Lesson Adjustment Response to Students Persistence					

Teacher Performance Criteria Clarifications

Teaching the Refinement/Improvement Areas

Define the missing or deficient skill

Tell person he is not meeting standards

Give clear, clean examples of deficiency

Define the needed or required skill

Share clear examples that illustrate the required skill

Define the effect of using this skill in the classroom

Ask employee to share problem, new skill, and possible uses

Set clear expectation for integration of new skill into classroom including timeline

From Eller & Eller, 2010

Teaching the Refinement/Improvement Areas (Planning Template)

Define the missing or deficient skill

Tell person he is not meeting standards

Give clear, clean examples of deficiency

Define the needed or required skill

Share clear examples that illustrate the required skill

Define the effect of using this skill in the classroom

Ask employee to share problem, new skill, and possible uses

Set clear expectation for integration of new skill into classroom
including timeline

From Eller & Eller, 2010

Frames of Reference

- A person experiences a series of events. Their mind takes in the information or data from these experiences.
- The person's mind begins to see common attributes from these experiences and the information drawn from them. Their mind starts to "put together" the information from these situations and draws conclusions about the experiences.
- These conclusions begin to form definite patterns. The patterns work together to become a way of thinking or frame of reference for the person. This frame of reference begins to govern the way this person sees the world. The frame of reference becomes reality for the person.
- Because of the frame of reference a comfort zone is established for the person. Experiences and information that fits into this frame of reference reinforces the thought pattern. The person becomes comfortable in his/her existing thought pattern because it establishes predictability for that person. Incoming information is filtered through this frame of reference. Information that matches the frame is reinforced; information that is counter to this frame of reference can be discounted.
- Over time, the living or work environment can change. The person becomes uncomfortable with the new environment because it doesn't fit his/her frame of reference. In order to remain comfortable the person may change or discount the information being provided in the new environment to reinforce the old thought pattern.
- Because the person is trying to fit the new information from the environment into an old frame of reference, they can become resistant to the new thought patterns, behaviors, or information coming to them.
- After exposure to the new information of ideas for a period of time, the person begins to see how it connects or is related to his/her original frame of reference. The new incoming information begins to assist the person as he/she develops a new frame of reference. Over time, the person is able to embrace the new ideas and integrate them into his/her operating procedures.

From Eller & Eller, 2010

Listening/Temporary Suspension of Opinion

Temporary suspension of opinion is an internal skill that allows the receiver of communication to withhold sharing an opinion about the message that was heard. Suspension is used to increase the opportunity of increased thinking and problem solving on the part of the sender. Presently, suspension is not used with much frequency in our society. We normally experience the opposite of suspension, cases where people are impatient with our thought process and who move in to give advice too quickly. This results in others finishing our sentences, prematurely giving their opinions and others not listening to our thoughts because they are busy formulating their own responses. When people use suspension, they are using it on a conscious basis for a selected period of time for the purposes of truly listening, understanding another perspective or to increase the problem solving capacities of the sender.

Temporary suspension of opinion is a strategic skill that requires much concentration on the part of the listener. It requires that the listener is really interested in listening to the sender of the message and understanding their perspective. Edgar Schein of MIT originally described this idea. His original thoughts were: "To suspend means to set aside our perceptions, our feelings, our judgments and our impulses for a time and listen to and monitor our own internal experience and what comes up from within the group." (Schein, 1993)

From Eller, J., & Eller, S., (2006).

Presuppositions

Hidden between the lines in our communication with others are statements that either empower or disable their problem solving capabilities. Suzette Elgin in her book The Gentle Art of Verbal Self Defense called these hidden messages presuppositions. Read the following statements and their possible “implied” messages:

Statement

Implied Meaning

Even George did well this week.

George, who is not as able as rest of us was able to do the job.

As you analyze your situation, what options will you select to improve.

The individual has the skills to analyze and select. She will be able to find a solution.

How can I help you get better?

The person is not able to improve, he needs help.

Since you’ve identified the improvement areas, what will be the first steps of your plan.

Ability to plan, collaboration, person can begin to plan.

As we work together to resolve this Issue, what role should each of us play?

Collaborative solution, partnership, appropriate responsibilities.

Surely someone of your experience will be able to understand my perspective.

Possibly putting down the person’s ability to understand.

The Use of Presuppositions

Presuppositional Statements That Help to Develop Responsibility and Ownership

- ◆ “As you think about how you’ll work together to do . . .”
- ◆ “What are your plans for . . . ?”
- ◆ “What will you need as you begin to solve . . . ?”
- ◆ “Share your next steps for . . .”
- ◆ “In relation to this situation, what will be the group’s first step . . . ?”
- ◆ “What is your role in . . . ?”
- ◆ “Share your ideas for . . .”
- ◆ “What will you do to address . . . ?”

Presuppositional Statements That Help to Develop Collaboration and Lower Negative Emotions

- ◆ “What ideas could we come up with together to . . . ?”
- ◆ “How do you see it . . . ?”
- ◆ “As we work together, . . .”
- ◆ “Once you help me understand . . .”
- ◆ “We can begin to design . . .”
- ◆ “Let’s work together to . . .”
- ◆ “Your role in this is . . . My role is . . .”
- ◆ “In previous situations we have been able to . . . I’m sure we can do . . .”

From Eller, 2004

The Use of Presuppositions (Con't.)

Presuppositional Phrases or Questions Designed to Build Problem-Solving Capacities

- ◆ “How will you use what you’ve learned today . . . ?” (designed to help person learn transfer of skills)
- ◆ “What did you notice when you . . . ?” (Helps increase observational/cause-effect)
- ◆ “Tell me more about the . . .” (develops elaboration)
- ◆ “Please explain your thoughts when you . . .” (gets individual to rationalize thinking)
- ◆ “How did you feel when . . . ?” (develops emotional responses)
- ◆ “Give me more details about . . .” (designed to deepen detail recall)
- ◆ “What were you trying for when you . . . ?” (draws out planning and anticipation skills)
- ◆ “What happened first, second . . . ?” (strengthens sequencing)
- ◆ “What did you observe that lead you to the conclusion . . . ?” (cause/effect relationships, reflections)
- ◆ “How will what you observed impact . . . ?” (reflection, future use)
- ◆ “Please replay the most important . . .” (recalling important events, sequencing)

From Eller, 2004

Paraphrasing/Reflecting

Paraphrasing statements help you to summarize the conversation or major points discussed in a meeting or conference. Paraphrasing/reflecting statements allow you to rephrase what the other person told you and help summarize their thoughts and perspectives. Here are some examples of paraphrasing/reflecting statements:

Paraphrasing/reflecting Statements
"I feel you are saying that you don't understand."
"It seems to me that you are confused."
"I hear you saying that you have three issues with my comments."
"You appear to me to be angry."
"I hear you saying you want . . ."

There are several paraphrasing/reflecting statement types we use in our work with others. Three types that we focus on are listed below:

Content: Returning what the sender told you in a slightly different form than it was said to you.

- "You shared the three main . . ."
- "I feel your major concerns seem to be . . ."
- "You said . . ."

Emotion: Paraphrasing/reflecting back the emotion you perceive the sender is feeling.

- "I feel this is very upsetting to you . . ."
- "To me it seems that you are feeling stress . . ."
- "I notice that you seem to be frustrated by . . ."

Chunking: Providing the other person a stream of content you've received and combined together to assist the sender in seeing the whole picture.

- "I heard that the three major points she made were . . ."
- "The first idea you shared was . . . The second . . ."
- "In my perceptions you general you have . . ."

From Eller J., and Carlson, H., (2009)

Framing

An effective tool to help set a good tone at the start of a meeting and to help shape the discussion in a meeting is framing. In framing, the speaker sets the boundaries for the session and the discussion that will occur in the meeting. The speaker draws a verbal boundary around the discussion or session. The speaker also assumes some control over the difficult person by setting the boundaries for the discussion. The following framing statement examples should provide some clarity in regard to this strategy:

- ◆ “As we work together today, we need to make sure that our discussion focuses on ideas that we will want to consider...”
- ◆ “Our [conversation] keeps getting off track because we are looking at the obstacles to your work. What we need to focus on right now are the potential benefits of what we are doing. At the end of our meeting, we can look at those issues that will hinder our progress.”

Considerations for Framing Statements at the Beginning of a Meeting

- ◆ Start using framing as a strategy that will be incorporated in the beginning of a meeting.
- ◆ Think about the perspectives that the participants will be bringing to the meeting; try to imagine what distractions from the posted agenda content could take them off track.
- ◆ Plan an opening that sets the parameters for the meeting; design statements that will establish these parameters, such as
 - ◆ “Today we are here to talk about . . .”
 - ◆ “The major points we need to address are . . .”
 - ◆ “As we work together we need to . . .”
 - ◆ “Even though there are other new topics that could be addressed in our meeting, we need to focus on . . .”
 - ◆ “At our last meeting, we got off track because of . . . In this meeting, we need to get . . .”
 - ◆ “Since we have limited time and personal energy, we are going to make sure that we stay on . . .”

From Eller (2004)

Framing Statements in Practice

Framing statements can help to constrain the discussions/behaviors of the person you are talking to. Take a few minutes to think about how they can be applied to your unique setting. Complete the following then talk about the information with others at your table.

Possible Problem/Distractor	Possible Framing Statement

Surviving Emotional Conversations

In many cases, emotionally-laden conversations can be difficult to have with others. When people are in extreme emotional situations, it can be difficult for them to reason and problem solve. This applies to us as well as the other person. You may recall situations when you were working with others and noticed that they were more rational and able to solve a problem once after the initial emotional situation passed. Keep the following in mind as you talk with others when they are dealing with an emotional situation:

- Use Temporary Suspension of Opinion to stay out of the “telling” mode; listen for key elements or major points.
- Watch for signals that indicate that the other person is not ready to talk about the situation; try to respect his need to “cool off” before talking about the topic or situation.
- Consider using prompts to get more details. Examples could include: “Tell me more” or “What other details could you provide?”
- When a pause occurs, use a reflecting statement to “sum up” the situation.
- If you need to find out more about the situation, use non-judgmental questions.
- Use Temporary Suspension of Opinion to control your own internal emotional state; observe the other person’s actions to help assess the return to a calmer state before digging deeper.
- Communicate that you are listening and want to understand the situation.

Authority Voice

When delivering difficult messages in conflict situations it is natural to be nervous and have a desire to avoid confrontations. One aspect we have found helpful over the years is to concentrate on the aspects of our voice delivery that convey that we are the authority figure in the conversation. There are several aspects that you will want to pay attention to in relation to how you deliver a negative message.

- As you deliver a directive or negative message, drop the pitch of your voice at the end of the statement. The dropping of the pitch will communicate to the receiver that you are the authority. When we hear a drop in pitch we assume competence. TV newscasters use this skill effectively when delivering messages to us.
- Pace the speed you use in delivering a negative message or directive. When you are placed in the position of sharing a negative aspect with a person it is natural to feel nervous and speed up your delivery. The increased speed can convey nervousness or lack of confidence. Set a natural pace with your language to ensure clarity and a feeling of confidence.
- Pausing at key points can reinforce the seriousness of the issue. Consider building in purposeful pauses to provide an emphasis on key points in the delivery of a directive or negative message. Resist trying to fill in the pause time with unnecessary word parts or noises. Compare the difference in the following conversations:

“Today, I want to share some concerns I have with your attitude. [Pause] The concerns revolve around three main issues. [Pause]The first issue is about your voice tone. [Pause] Every time I mention an issue, you roll your eyes. [Pause]We have talked about this problem before and you shared your perspective. [Pause]”

In this conversation, the pauses were inserted by the person delivering the message to reinforce the main points she wanted to make. The silence experienced as a result of the pause allowed a few seconds for the receiver of the message to think about the consequences of the behavior.

From Eller & Eller, 2010

A Competency-based Approach to Supervision

Base Competencies- Base competencies are the kind of skills that are at the core of an employee's person or personality. Foundational skills tend to be developed over time in a person and cover more of the affective part of an employee's job. Base competencies cannot be easily taught but must be developed over time with support and coaching. The absence of base competencies tends to lead to termination from job assignments.

Examples:

- The ability to build rapport with others
- Being able to listen actively in a conversation
- Having a sense of empathy for others
- Having an understanding of surrounding situations ("with-itness")
- The ability to multi-task

Surface competencies- Surface competencies are the kind of skills that are most directly related to the technical aspects of the job. Surface competencies are the skills typically taught to employees as a part of their job orientation/induction process. These skills can be learned fairly quickly and measured in a straight-forward manner. Deficits in the surface competencies area can lead to termination for inefficiency or incompetence in job performance.

Examples:

- The ability to use word processing skills to complete tasks
- Being able to operate cleaning equipment
- The ability to complete required reports
- The ability to administer tests and assessments
- Being able to operate a computer and the software necessary to complete required job tasks

From Eller & Eller, 2010

Deciding to Move to Termination or Developing a Growth Plan

Name and subject area of employee _____

Severity of the deficiencies

Number of deficient areas

Relationship between deficient areas

Results of previous remediation attempts

Time required to teach the needed skills

Ability to teach required skills

Administration/board's attitude toward termination

Community political realities

Physical/intellectual capacities of employee

Base or surface competency deficiency

Figure 2.4 Employee Improvement Assessment Template

Employee Name _____ Assignment _____
<p>1. List the deficit skills you are concerned about in relation to this employee</p> <p>Base Competencies</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Surface Competencies</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>2. List the impact of these deficits</p> <p>Negative Impact on the Organization</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Negative Impact on Individuals</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>3. How much of my time do I need to invest in this employee to help improve their performance?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How quickly do I need the performance issues to improve with this employee?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Can I and the organization handle the amount of time it will take this employee to improve?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

From Eller & Eller, 2010

Question Categories

The word order and selection in a question causes the minds of the groups you lead/facilitate to process information in a specific manner. Examine the following and see how the questions cause processing to occur.

Question type	Examples
Questions that set context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's your goal at this meeting? • What are your expected outcomes?
Questions that invite development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you say more? • What else is connected to this?
Questions that probe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did this start? • Who's involved? • What's the history of this?
Questions that clarify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you saying...? • Am I to understand that...?
Questions that diverge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would be the opposite of that? • What would others do?
Questions that reframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you say that in another way? • If we were to implement the first part, what would the problem look like?
Questions that link	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What else fits here? • What else comes to mind that is similar? • When did this happen before?
Questions that invite challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who else sees it in a different way? • What would another group make of this?
Questions that test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the pros and cons of this? • What are the main blocks and barriers?
Questions that summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key ideas we talked about? • What can we say to bring closure?
Questions that build buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's in it for you? • What do you stand to gain?
Questions that overcome resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What concerns you about this topic? • What conditions or assurances will help you overcome those concerns?

From Bens, I., (2005). *Advanced Facilitation Strategies: Tools and Techniques to Master Difficult Situations*. Jossey-Bass. P. 35.

Question Categories-Planning Worksheet

Now that you have had some practice in looking at questions, try to generate some of your own. After you have generated a few, talk with another participant about your questions and how they would help shape a group's thinking.

Question type	Questions you generated
Questions that set context	
Questions that invite development	
Questions that probe	
Questions that clarify	
Questions that diverge	
Questions that reframe	
Questions that link	
Questions that invite challenge	
Questions that test	
Questions that summarize	
Questions that build buy-in	
Questions that overcome resistance	

Major Types of Difficult and Resistant Staff

1 The Underminers	5 The On-the-Job Retirees
2 The Contrarians	6 The Resident Experts
3 The Recruiters	7 The Unelected Representatives
4 The Challenged	8 The Whiners and Complainers

Session Evaluation

Please take a few minutes and provide feedback about today's session. Your information will help us in evaluating the session and making future decisions about areas for your support.

- 1. From your perspective, what were the positive aspects of today's workshop?

- 2. What didn't go as well as you would have liked or what do you wish we had spent time on that we didn't get a chance to discuss?

- 3. What general comments do you want to make that you have not yet addressed?
