How to Deal with Aggressive Colleagues

1. **Believe the challenge is surmountable**

If you adopt the mindset that the situation is unresolvable due to ‘creative’ or ‘irreconcilable’ differences, then the situation will remain unresolved and you will remain miserable. Very rarely are two people unable to work with one another at all. If you believe you can find a resolution, you will. As car magnate Henry Ford once put it, “whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re probably right”.

2. **Don’t become aggressive yourself**

It’s tempting to fight fire with fire and adopt aggressive behaviours yourself, but this will almost inevitably lead to an exacerbation of the situation. When you feel your blood rising, step back from the situation and think about how you really want to react to events. Practice relaxation techniques to help you keep calm when you’re feeling threatened. Extract yourself from a potentially combative situation by excusing yourself to the bathroom if necessary.

3. **Talk it through when you’re both calm**

When both yourself and the aggressively-behaving individual are calm, try to have a conversation with them in private about what’s going on. Many people don’t even realise they’re being aggressive in the heat of the moment and just get carried away. If a colleague is finding themselves ‘in the heat of the moment’ a little too often, calmly talk this through with them in a neutral space where you both feel comfortable. Don’t adopt an accusatory tone but instead neutrally state what you’ve noticed about your co-worker’s behaviour and ask if there’s anything you can do to help.

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A lot of the time, there may be deeper issues at play and the person in question may just need someone to listen and to then point them in the direction of another individual or party more qualified to provide more specialised support.

4. Seek professional guidance

There’s no shame in approaching a career guide for supplementary help with dealing a difficult colleague. Ideally, a good career guide will have plenty of their own work experiences to draw from and will therefore be able to empathise with you and work with you to develop practical and realistic strategies for handling aggressive co-workers.

5. Speak with your boss

Equally, there’s no shame in speaking to your line manager about the situation. You should not view this as ‘telling tales’ or ‘grassing up’ your colleague. We all have the right to feel safe and comfortable at work and if one particular individual is obstructing you from feeling thus, you have every right to take whatever measures you need to in order to resolve the situation. This can include discussing the matter with your manager, no matter how trivial you think it is. Work is such an important part of our lives that your happiness in the workplace is worth the investment of escalating the matter up the organisational hierarchy if needs be.

This checklist has been created by Position Ignition Ltd one of the UK’s leading career consulting companies.

Please contact enquiries@positionignition.com for more information or to suggest additional resources.