

Monday, March 31, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

### Dealing with Nasty People

You don't have to teach very long before you encounter a nasty person&hellip;student, parent, colleague, principal, administrator, school board member, ad nauseam.And whether this is because&hellip;You work in the wrong place

Your students come from the "the wrong side of of your belief system"

You work with the wrong class of people

You work with a "bunch of morons"

You attract "dark-mood" people

You have a bad attitude

You behave badly and bring these unpleasant reactions upon yourself

You stumble into negative situations

You don't have a clue&hellip;You have to deal with the situations that dealing with nasty people creates for you.

You need to determine what is going on during these situations, and you must also determine what role you are playing&hellip;inadvertent, by design, accidental bystander, whatever.

What you must do is prevent the nastiness from escalating into either:A Power Struggle

A One-Up-Person-Ship Ploy (Note: Politically correct but silly description)

Revenge

Mistake

Personal or Professional Slight

Depression or Mental IllnessDiffusing a Bomb, or Bombing Out?You encounter nasty situations from time to time. If you find that the people that cause this upset and turmoil are in your life every day (such as a student, or family member), then you need life skills and coping strategies that are beyond the scope of this article.

On the other hand, if these "nastiness binges" are infrequent, you might need to prepare so that your reaction is pre-meditated, professional and career stabilizing.

Miscalculate one of these "nasty numbers" and you can find yourself:Explaining (and giving excuses) to your supervisors

Providing endless pages of documentation of your recollection of the incident

Blaming yourself for being "stupid" and getting beat in the "one-on-one" game that the nasty person "sucked" you into

Ruing the lack of administrative support that you receive from folks higher up the chain of command

Seeking legal advice

Looking for another jobThe first task you face is to perceive "reality."Blame's the Name of the GameYou might think that you are in the "Right Corner." You may be right, and you may be able to prove it (at least to yourself, and to your long-suffering spouse). But being right often means loosing.

The reason that being "right" is most often "wrong" is that "dealing a loss" to the nasty person generally means a "rematch," often on a new court or playing field chosen by the nasty person, and on their terms.

But, avoid loosing, too. Loosing only encourages the nasty person to set you up again for another round.

So, the key strategy for dealing with a nasty person is to avoid laying blame in any direction.

This means readjusting your vocabulary, if not your belief system.

Can you see the issue from the other person's side? Does their point of view make sense, even if you think that it is in error?

Or, is the other person's point of view so "out of touch with reality" that you think that they are crazy. Guess what? They may be mentally ill.

But, if a person is mentally ill; you have "zero chance" of changing their mind and and even smaller chance of helping them to see the errors in their thinking, and a still smaller chance that they will accept blame.

Give up any pretense of convincing the mentally ill nasty person that you are right. And, if you believe that you can convince such a person that they are to blame; you are just as much out of touch with reality as they are.Tact and States-Person-Ship (Note: Another politically correct but stupid phrase)Whether the nasty person brings an "off the wall" accusation, or a dossier of substantiated facts that incriminates you; your response skill set must be pulled from the same strategy, i.e., a professional response with all the characteristics of a "guilty candidates spin on yet another revelation of wrongdoing."

You require tact, discretion, and valor when a nasty person precipitates an unpleasant situation. You must exemplify "courage under fire," even if the barrage and fusillade is verbal and accusatory. Your skill in dodging in an elegant manner prevents you from being "cannon fodder" that is pulverized by the nasty person's verbal pyrotechnics.

The techniques that you use to prevent gouging your stomach with an ulcer include:Identify common ground

Accept accountability, liability, culpability (but, only if you are responsible)

Keep the conversation focused upon what outcomes the nasty person wants and what outcomes the nasty person

would like see

Hear the complaint out&hellip;all of it

Come to some agreement&hellip;either a resolution, or the next step

As odious as this may sound, you gain the advantage by agreeing with the nasty person on some level. Agreeing creates a sliver of rapport, more than you had before the incident,

and more than you have if you disagree. Agreeing also gives you a slight negative reinforcement advantage; i.e., you now are in the "driver's seat with the ability to pull your agreement." Simple, Professional Techniques Here are some techniques for dealing with nasty and irate folks without stooping to their level and telling them that you hope they get hit by a truck and die!

You may find it useful to: Keep from "taking it personally." The nasty person will try to attack you at a personal level.

Don't take this bait!

Diffuse the situation with kindness (as much as you can)

Attempt to reschedule (when you can muster reinforcements or find allies, or at least witnesses)

Affirm (to yourself) that you do not need to tolerate abuse.

Picture your self-concept and self-esteem as strong and stable, like a seaworthy ship in a storm, pulling out just fine

Do what you can to accommodate (within reason)

Look for a way for the nasty person to save face

Keep "the customer/ boss is always right" in perspective, too. Don't allow this "sunny day" concept to "go to far"

Realize that this may not be your problem. If not, refer or get help

Don't fall for the "fear tactics" of "taking the complaint to your supervisor&hellip;or higher." Call their bluff, and ask to jointly invite the supervisor in on the discussion

Restate any threat to hire a lawyer as one that the nasty person has a right to do at any time, but that there might be other ways to arrive at a solution without the nasty person going through the expense of hiring an attorney and placing control in the slow mechanism of the legal system

Sometimes the nasty person is just looking for an easy target to subject to their frustrations, anger, hatred, resentment or mental aberrations. Don't be that "easy mark"

Listen to the ranting and raving, then respond kindly. Respond in a congruent fashion and state that you understand their frustration. Honestly relate that you want to work with them and resolve the issue. This step can often diffuse anger and release a rational human being. Of course, sometimes it won't.

Be prepared. Decide whether or not to seek help.

And know the boundaries of the situation.

For example, issues involving Emotionally Disturbed and Learning Handicapped children may require Special Education and Planning Committee meetings. Or, students may need to be referred to the Special Education testing program.

This means that you have allies, helpers, counselors and friends that can help you though some situations.

But, avoid any steam-frustration-valve releases in the Teachers' Lounge. Consider any statement made in the Teacher's Lounge to be as private as a post card or E-mail message. Final Advice And, though dealing with the perpetually nasty person, may be a fact of life for working professionals such as teachers; be sure that the grit and grime of the interaction stays at work. Keep the stress and pressure of the event or interaction at work. Don't carry any of this interpersonal grime home to contaminate the positive, loving, caring, trusting relationships you have with your family and friends with Keeping the issues and emotions at work means avoiding rehashing the incident at home. Do not use family and friends as sounding boards for your frustrations.

Your work environment may contain industrial-strength interpersonal pollution, but your home environment can be pristine. Keep it that way for your well being.

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