

This presentation was prepared by Dr. Perry Sirota and it is his copyright.  
Any duplication or dissemination is prohibited without the prior consent of Dr. Perry Sirota.

## **DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE**

---

Risk Management Counsel of Canada  
Living Arts Centre, Mississauga, ON.  
April 22, 2009

Presenter : **Dr. Perry Sirota**  
Clinical and Forensic Psychologist  
Management Consultant  
Calgary, Alberta  
sirotap@shaw.ca  
(403) 255-3773

**Dr. Perry Sirota**, Ph.D., is a Clinical and Forensic Psychologist and a business strategist and consultant. He earned a First Class Honours degree from McGill University, both Masters and Doctorate degrees from Queen's University, and is in the last stage of competing his M.B.A. He has advanced training and practice in the areas of conflict, mediation, respectful workplaces, mental health assessments, litigation support, risk management, risk assessment and prediction, criminal profiling, threat assessment, violence and aggression intervention, drug and alcohol addiction assessment and treatment, and workplace violence. He works with organizations and corporations, assisting them in developing internal screening methods, workplace violence, harassment, drug/and alcohol policies, and managing crisis and emergency situations. He prepares psychological evaluations for all Court jurisdictions, and has testified as an expert witness over 300 times, including at the Court of Queen's Bench and in Labour Arbitrations. He travels broadly, responding to threat situations and incidents of violence, and conducts seminars and workshops across a variety of topic areas.

## **FORMAT**

---

- Everyone is different
- Some people can be very difficult
- It helps to consider the ways people can be different
- Difficult people can be described as types

## **PEOPLE**

---

- The better we understand people, the better able we are to resolve conflicts with them
- The typology that follows is based on my experience and is not supported by any specific research or data. It is anecdotal
- These descriptions apply to coworkers, authority figures, friends, loved ones, and adversaries, amongst others

## >>THE INTROVERT

<b>Identifier</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Description	Shy, quiet, avoids conflict, won't express opinions, won't initiate
Motivation	Highly anxious, afraid, awkward in social situations
Solution	Initiate discussions, maintain calm voice and manner

## >>THE INTERRUPTER

<b>Identifier</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Description	Speaks before other person finishes
Motivation	Impatient, has a lot to say, poor social skills
Solution	Politely request to be allowed to finish, keep message concise, resist being controlled

## >>THE YELLER

<b>Identifier</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Description	Raises voice, screams
Motivation	Insecure, anxious, expects negative outcomes, feels threatened, easily upset
Solution	Maintain soothing tone, do not yell back or engage, reassure, empathize

## >>THE MANIPULATOR

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Attempts to control the situation or outcome by using guilt, seduction, deceit, incentives or sympathy
Motivation	Used to getting own way, poor boundaries, narcissistic, inadequate
Solution	Maintain strong boundaries, be aware of own feelings, reactions, and temptations. Stick to your guns

## >>THE CRIER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Gets upset easily, becomes emotional, cries
Motivation	Sensitive, highly emotional, anxious
Solution	Crying is natural. Maintain the dialogue, but offer the person an opportunity for a break. Don't assume the person cannot continue. Be patient

## >>THE DOMINATOR

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Takes over the conversation. Does not back down
Motivation	Used to being in control. Interpersonally aggressive
Solution	Oppose equally. Recognize that the person may be unwilling to negotiate. Attempt to find a common ground or basis for persuasion

## >>THE BULLY

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Treats others in a hurtful manner, often making fun of perceived vulnerabilities. Uses social power to tease, isolate, torment
Motivation	Internally insecure or inadequate. Often victim of abusive relationships in childhood. Jealous of others
Solution	Maintain composure. Do not show fear or let the bully see a reaction. Appear indifferent. Do not engage or fight if possible

## >>THE DISMISSER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Appears to acknowledge what is being said, but then responds with something like "yes-but". Essentially appears to agree but doesn't really. Closed to feedback
Motivation	Tending to disagree but not wanting to be assertive about it. Does not like to be challenged. Set is his/her ways
Solution	Is not inclined to listen to arguments. Try to establish some easy points of agreement and build from there. In many cases, it is necessary to avoid sharing personal information with this type. Often necessary to be very assertive

## >>THE ARGUER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Everything becomes an argument. This person is contentious and difficult. Brings up past issues
Motivation	Another example of a disagreeable person. Finds that arguing tends to get people to back down and give in. Jumps to conclusions
Solution	Do not give in, and do not engage in the argument. Sometimes it is necessary to leave and reschedule. Establish rules of engagement, or bring in allies like a mediator

## >>THE BUTTON PUSHER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	This person knows what hurts and triggers it by making a reference to a painful or difficult issue
Motivation	Reacts positively to upsetting people and then can act like the victim. Plays dumb but isn't
Solution	Be aware of both your own triggers and your history with this person. Ignore cheap shots that are clearly intended to upset. Do not escalate. They are your buttons. Keep your power!

## >>THE HOSTAGE TAKER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	A particularly challenging person, who will make threats to establish dominance and control outcomes. A classic scenario is the person who threatens suicide to avoid being fired or experience loss of a relationship
Motivation	Used to being in control. Interpersonally aggressive. Tends to have poor mental health. Has poor relationships but cannot tolerate losing them. Most threats are for attention and control
Solution	Ultimately, make decisions regardless of threats, but be aware of threats and act accordingly. For example, if a soon to be terminated person threatens suicide, get mental health services involved and follow through with termination when appropriate

## >>THE MATCHER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Makes everything about self. "If you think you have it bad, you should see what I have to deal with". Or "you hurt my feelings too"
Motivation	Narcissistic and egocentric. Lacks empathy. Seen a lot in relationship arguments. This person may genuinely feel ignored with own issues
Solution	Make suggestions to focus on the topic at hand. Examine the nature of the relationship and attempt to be fair. Give each person time to talk about issues and find a common manner of listening and validating

## >>THE BLAMER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	It's never their fault. They admit to wrongdoing, but then attribute blame externally
Motivation	Hates to be wrong. Hates admitting to being wrong. Feels weak and with limited social power
Solution	Avoid escalating into argument. Make things about accountability, responsibility and understanding, not blame. In power situations like employment, focus on expectations and facts, not reasons and excuses

## >>THE EXAGGERATOR

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Makes things bigger than they are. Exaggerates negatives, often minimizes positives. Things are often terrible
Motivation	Tends to see things that way. Not usually a manipulation. May have mental health issues, like anxiety. Attention seeking should be considered
Solution	Attempt to reason using facts and logic. Encourage seeing shades of grey vs black or white. Do not disagree with the substance, just the extremes

## >>THE LIAR

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Intentionally makes false statements. To be distinguished from unintentional lying or self-deception. Denies wrong doing, fabricates problems
Motivation	Wants what is not available or achievable. Attempts to get out of trouble. Some people lie chronically and pathologically, others are situational. Can be mental health
Solution	No easy solution. Be aware of people's tendencies. Ask for verification. Few people are good lie detectors. Some situations are more likely to involve lying

## >>THE FIGHTER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	May or may not get angry, but takes conflict to an adversarial and sometimes aggressive level. A fighter is more aggressive than an arguer
Motivation	May or may not believe in own legitimacy, but does not like to lose. Reinforcement from fighting. Sometimes insecure and intimidated
Solution	Beware of fighters. They most often will not back down and will engage in a high-conflict manner. Reassure there is no threat, and look for areas of mutual agreement

## >>THE DEFENDER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Denies wrongdoing or fault. Gets upset when confronted or "accused"
Motivation	Sensitive, feelings easily hurt, has mental health issues, lack of confidence. Lacks self-awareness of this characteristic
Solution	Explain things in a sensitive manner. Soften approach. Avoid blaming or accusing. Recognize the person's feelings and allow for time to adjust to information. Go at a slow pace with difficult information

## >>THE ACCUSER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Very confrontational and accusatory. Does not seek to understand problems, instead jumping to negative conclusions. Like a parent who comes home and says "who stole my money", only to learn later that the money was misplaced
Motivation	Negative view of the world and people. Impulsive and impatient. Not very empathic
Solution	Try not to engage or feel wronged. Realize the person is acting according to long established patterns, clarify details and elicit more information. This can also be a form of button-pushing

## >>THE INSULTER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Engages in name calls or put-downs. Personalizes conflict
Motivation	Poor or negative social skills. Interpersonally aggressive. Used to escalated conflict. Sees disagreements and conflict as win-lose, and wants to win
Solution	Do not engage or get sucked in to respond in kind. Take the high road. Set boundaries and stick to them, but be aware of context and norms. In some adversarial situations, it is pragmatic to just ignore insults and move on with the agenda

## >>THE STUFFER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	This person minimizes or denies problems in life. Is not able to identify negative feelings. Feels good even when bad is happening. Does not respond well in a crisis
Motivation	Naïve view of the world. Very sensitive and avoids negative emotional states. Mental health may be fragile
Solution	Respect the person's feelings. Do not force the person to feel. May not be a good choice for a leadership position

## >>THE RESCUER

Identifier	Explanation
Description	Tries to help and save people, instead of letting them learn from their mistakes
Motivation	Needs to feel like a good person. Has difficulty watching people suffer
Solution	It is often necessary to remind this person of the trait. Rescuers are able to develop insight and usually can change with coaching

## >>THE DENIER

<b>Identifier</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Description	It's simple. This person denies wrongdoing. "You hit me" - "No, I didn't".
Motivation	Refuses to take responsibility for actions. Wants to maintain positive self-image in the face of serious problems.
Solution	It is very easy to get exasperated and to lose control. Assume that the denier is aware of behaviour, and don't get drawn into feeling crazy. Remain composed and focus on facts, and walk away if things escalate. It may be necessary to end relationship

## >>THE SHORT FUSE

<b>Identifier</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Description	Quick to anger and becomes easily agitated
Motivation	Guarded and easily provoked. Believes others are in opposition. May be anxious and even paranoid. Mental health often or likely impaired
Solution	Can be volatile and even dangerous. Have good rapport and a safety plan. Treat with caution. Do not get drawn into an argument, and ensure own calm. Do not say calm down!