

Managing different personalities

Listen to what is said, not said and always stay positive

Why is it important to know how to manage different personalities?

Martini: If you know how to manage different personalities, you will be much more effective in your professional and personal dealings. You will see how different types of people view the world and how they communicate, and what their baseline is for various emotions.

You will also better understand the context in which people say and do certain things and the true meaning of their verbal and non-verbal cues. You will be able to adapt your approach as needed so that your communications are more likely to be fully heard, rather than be tuned out. All of these things are particularly important in a service profession like ours, where measuring success is based on highly subjective, human criteria.

Susler: For in-house attorneys, this is especially important. We regularly deal with at least three different constituencies — our business colleagues, attorneys and customers-vendors.

These can be further broken out into, for example, senior executives, sales people, administrative support or factory workers; and outside counsel and in-house colleagues. Broadly speaking, each of these groups has different needs, focuses and goals. It is critical to our success as in-house counsel to be able to understand and deal with many different personality types.

How do you figure out someone's personality when you do not know them?

Martini: There are various steps you can take to educate yourself about another person.

For example, if you are familiar with someone who knows them, you can ask questions. You can also do your own independent research, online and otherwise, to familiarize yourself with their professional and personal background to gain a working knowledge of their life experiences and what makes them tick.

All of these things will be helpful in guiding you through your initial communications with this person, whether verbal or in writing. In your initial dealings with them, you should pay particularly close attention to what is said and unsaid as well as the general tone with which their ideas are communicated. In-person meetings are much preferred in this respect, because you are then able to observe non-verbal cues, which are often significantly more informative than the substance of the communication itself.



Inside Out

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Watch them interact more about this topic with the Better Government Association's Andy Shaw at chicagolawyer.com. To submit a question for future columns, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com.

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This is something that I think becomes easier over time, especially in professional/work settings, yet it is something that everyone can work on and improve at. I believe in the adage that you attract more flies with honey than with vinegar, and I think this approach can often work when dealing with difficult personalities. But it does not always work and you have to develop a thick skin to understand that it is them, not you.

It may take trial and error, and may take time to figure someone out and how to deal with them. Sometimes all it takes is finding a mutual interest that creates a connection on a more personal level which will smooth things going forward. ■

Susler: Listening and observing are essential skills when trying to learn someone's personality. Engage people in conversation and pay particular attention to what they say and also to how they react, their manners and their body language.

These are all clues to one's personality. This is another example of emotional intel-

ligence. For some people with high EQ, this is almost instinctive, yet for others it is more challenging. However, if you take the time to do as Tina suggested, you will learn a lot about a person.

What are some tips for dealing with more difficult personalities?

Martini: In order to effectively deal with a difficult personality, you need to know that you are dealing with one — to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Once you figure that out, you can tailor your approach. You should identify as quickly as possible what specifically makes this person prickly. What are their pressure points, from substantive and stylistic standpoints? How do these people show their satisfaction and displeasure with you and others? What is their real agenda, and how do they define success and failure in various situations?

Finally, while you should always do your best to stay measured and to take the high road even when you are right and they are wrong, you also need to relax and let go at a certain point. Always remember, you can't take it personally.

Susler: I would add that you can also seek advice from trusted colleagues, friends and mentors about how to deal with a difficult personality.

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