

To be or Not to be Nice, That's the Question

Tips on Dealing with Difficult People

You've probably heard more than one speech about being nice. Perhaps a teacher, parent, or clergy person extolled the virtues of doing kind deeds and maintaining a pleasant demeanor. No matter how angry you get, they instruct, no matter how much the revenge-urge boils steam out of your ears, it's important to always be nice. Well, the truth is, they were right...but not completely.

Maintaining a pleasant demeanor is a good idea, as is validating people's comments and opinions. But what do you do when someone seems to callously nitpick at small details? Or when someone, in their tunnel vision of concentration, hogs the entire question round during an important meeting? We've all went to school and worked with these types of people—what is one supposed to do with only niceness in their arsenal? The answer is: fight fire with fire.

You won't get anywhere being overly pleasant and nice to them—they'll just misunderstand your comments and keep on doing what they're doing. And being nasty or imitating their behavior won't work either—that just escalates the situation. The key here is to be polite *and* assertive. Confront them with respect but a backbone that keeps you from losing our opinion and your cool. A policy of niceness is something that simply does not work 100% of the time. We must be able to size up situations and evaluate people in order to tailor specific solutions to specific problems.

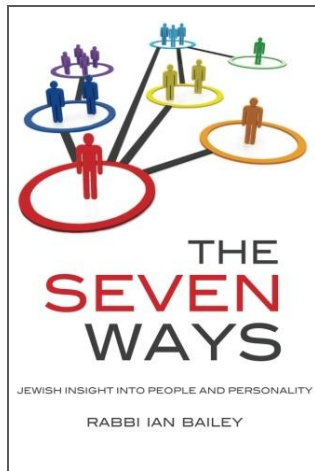


Who is it?

When strong-minded, detail oriented people act like his, they are one of the most extreme examples of difficult people. I call these types of people Guardians—roughly equivalent to a strong Myers-Briggs ISTJ or the Enneagram's Six. They are Guardians, however, who are not utilizing their unique skill set properly. Though they are able to be extremely self-disciplined and foster change within their environment, many of them

adopt an alternative path, filled with pushiness and over-analysis. Since “[w]aiting for other people to change is like planning your future around winning the lottery”[1], the onus is usually on us to develop a solution.

The key is to be a good actor, while still maintaining your original role as



yourself. Stay true to yourself and your opinions, but adopt a similar demeanor in order to make them feel more comfortable with you. The proper response has to do with a strong demeanor, not strong content. The proper script for your new hybrid role is to adopt their language, so they will understand you better; tilt your head forward, mimic their analytical tone and be direct with your comments. As long as you do not speak in a patronizing manner, your message will actually get across more effectively.

"Waiting for other people to change is like planning your future around winning the lottery"

The takeaway here is that we must be adept at dealing with people who have many different types of personalities, and we must remind ourselves to be on the lookout for each type. When we get out of our own subjective headspace we can instantaneously increase productivity, communication, and workplace harmony.

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[1] Michael P. Nichols, PhD., who specializes in clinical psychology, family therapy, and couples dynamics.