



Dealing with difficult people

People become difficult when things don't go their way. So what exactly is "their way"?

By Nathan Chanesman

In a dental practice environment, dealing with difficult people is probably the dentist's biggest source of aggravation. As a dentist, you could say "running a dental practice would be easy if it wasn't for the people problems". Teeth can be easily fixed; people are more difficult. Just as some people bring out the best in you, others bring out the worst. Of course I'm referring to both staff and patients. Someone said business would be easy if it wasn't for the customers. Problem is, you can't do without either so you better figure out how to deal with difficult people otherwise life won't be worth drilling... I mean living.

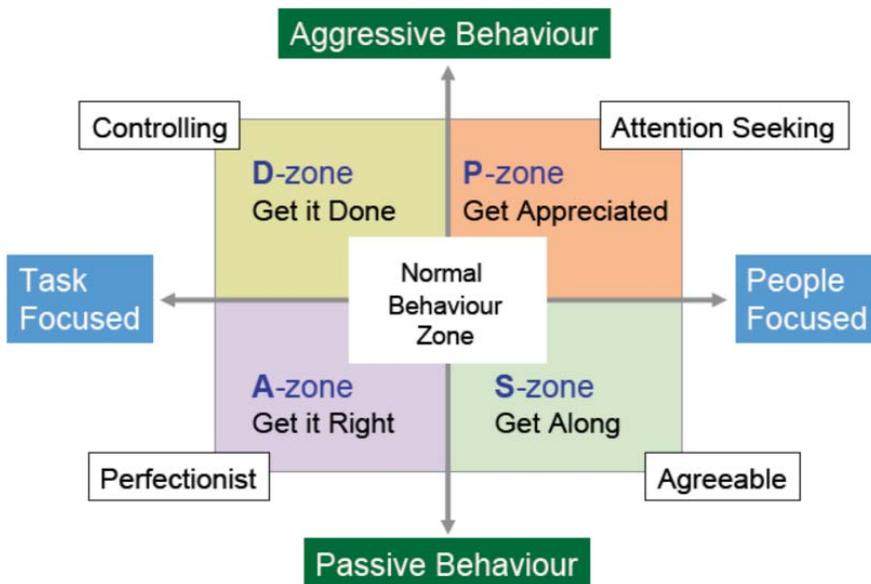
Every behaviour, whether acceptable or problematic, has a primary intent or purpose that it is trying to accomplish. These are either to:

1. Get the task done;
2. Get the task right;
3. Get along with people; or
4. Get appreciated by people.

Your ability to recognize these four behavioural traits is the first step in influencing people to change their behaviour, and whilst you can't change difficult people, you can communicate with them in such a way as they change themselves.

We each deal with conflict, stress and anger differently. The fact is we each boil at different temperatures. Let's look at these four styles and see how each acts and reacts.

The chart indicates the four behavioural style zones. Normal behaviour is the central zone. We are neither very aggressive or very passive, we manage doing tasks as



we cooperate and interact with people when doing our job. When we get stressed or annoyed our behaviour moves off to the zone that represents our personal style. We each have a personal purpose as to how we want things done:

1. Drivers (the action people) want to get the task done now.
2. Promoters (the fun people) want to be appreciated.
3. Supporters (the team people) just want to get along.
4. Analysers (the detail people) want to get it done correctly.

When these goals become frustrated then each style "becomes difficult".

Drivers in the D-zone

Drivers have a need to get things done. They want jobs completed quickly. When this goal is frustrated it distorts their perception. They think people are wasting time, going off on a tangent, taking too long, taking advantage of them, doing other things and so on. Driver become assertive. They can quickly become argumentative, controlling, loud and abusive. Like a bulldozer they want to push their way through, or over any obstacle. That's the quickest most direct route to solving a problem. If it creates another one, no problem, they'll solve that next. They

focus on getting the task done. They are not interested in people's feelings. People are secondary to getting the job done.

Promoters in the P-zone

Promoters need to be recognized and appreciated. That's what drives this style. When this doesn't happen Promoters feel isolated, unloved and unwanted. Outbursts can occur in the form of explosions. Lack of positive feedback causes a temper tantrum. "I don't know why I bother, no one really cares". These explosions are uncontrolled. It can take the form of sly personal criticism or it can be in the form of a person "who thinks they know it all". When they don't get appreciated their behaviour becomes "attention getting". They become difficult to ignore.

Supporters in the S-zone

Supporters want to get along and when they feel they are being left out their behaviour becomes approval seeking. They sacrifice their personal needs to please and get along with others. When they feel that they are uncertain how others see them they will become quiet and say nothing, they might become the "yes" person who agrees with everyone in order to please them, or they become the "maybe" person because they want to avoid disapproval by avoiding decisions. The "avoidance strategy" ensures that they don't hurt the feelings of the others and thereby avoid conflict.

Analysers in the A-zone

Analysers want to get it right. They are task focused and this purpose influences their behaviour. They avoid making hurried decisions, they are risk-averse and are detailed oriented. When Analysers fear that it will be done wrong their behaviour becomes perfectionist. They'll find every flaw and error. They begin to whine that nothing is right and adopt a feeling of hopeless that nothing will change. Any solution is met with "it won't work, we've tried that". In the end Analysers will withdraw from everything saying "fine, let's do it your way but it's not going to work".

When personal fears are triggered, difficulties arise

When people believe their personal objectives and behavioural style is not being met, it creates a fear and unease which leads them to become "difficult". Managers and colleagues need to be alert to changes in normal behaviour.

1. Drivers behaviour becomes **controlling** when they fear it's not getting done.
2. Promoters behaviour becomes **attention getting** when they fear they are being ignored.
3. Supporters behaviour becomes **approval seeking** when they fear they're not getting along.
4. Analysers behaviour becomes **perfectionist** when they fear things are not being done right.

Dealing with difficulties

As you can see each type of person needs to be communicated, managed and listened to differently. There's no point telling a "Driver" person that "they're doing a good job, calm down" when their major fear and concern is that things are not getting done fast enough. It's not recognition they're after it's a solution. Who's going to do it, by when and how.

The key to dealing with all types of people is to **listen**. People become more difficult if no one's listening to what they say. When people express themselves verbally they want to accomplish at least two things. One, that they are being heard and two, that they've been understood. When two or more people want to be heard and no one is willing to listen, an argument is inevitable. By listening and repeating back what they have said you diffuse the situation because conflict occurs when the emphasis is on differences. **Reducing differences can turn conflict into cooperation.**

About the author

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