

## **Annoying Habits of Coworkers**

Air Dates: May 2-6, 2022

### **Day One**

No doubt you have worked with or for someone who had some annoying habits. I thought it would be a good idea to look at some of these, ask how we should respond to such a coworker, and most importantly, make certain we are not guilty of annoying habits ourselves.

So, let's consider annoying habit number one: You work with a person who makes daily calls to their mate or partner, and since you work in an open setting, you can't help but hear the conversation. Depending on how they are getting along on any particular day, you may hear a nasty conversation with anger and accusations, or you may hear what sounds like sweet murmurings or baby talk.

Obviously, if you hold a supervisory position over this person, it should be addressed directly with clear instructions that those kinds of conversations should be on personal time and equipment, not on company time. However, if you are not this person's manager or supervisor, you may be able to bring this to your coworker's attention in such a way that they will see the benefit of changing that annoying habit.

Proverbs 17:27 says, "The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered." Your words would need to be carefully chosen, delivered kindly, and done with the right motivation.

For example, you might find the right moment—a private moment—to say something like, "You probably are not aware that your conversations with your mate can be heard by other people. I thought I'd let you know, because I know if it were me, I wouldn't want others to listen in to my daily personal conversations. You might want to reserve those calls for times when you're alone."

There's a lesson for all of us to learn in this, and that is, to use our working time to work, not to rob our employer of the time when we are paid to work with elongated personal conversations, whether they're overheard by others or not.

As Christians in the workplace, these little annoying habits can do damage to our testimony for Jesus Christ, so we should make sure we're not guilty of these.

### **Day Two**

Do you work with someone who just can't ever seem to get to work on time? Someone who is habitually late is not committing a great offense. This is simply an annoying bad habit. But then, that's what we're talking about this week, annoying bad habits of coworkers and how we should respond to them.

I find that many who are guilty of habitual lateness frequently want to justify it by saying that they work late to make up for it, or they have a very long commute, and that may be true. But the facts are, if your company has a certain start time, everyone should be there on time consistently. Why? Because it's the right thing to do.

This is a management issue. If it's important for people to be on time, management must set the priorities, communicate them clearly, and hold people accountable. There would have to be some kind of negative consequence for the person who will not change that annoying habit.

However, if you're not this person's manager, there's not a whole lot you can do about this annoying habit. One thing you don't want to do is make snide remarks about it or communicate your annoyance with body language or harsh words. Unfortunately, that happens too often where people don't confront the real issue and instead display their displeasure in other ineffective and unkind ways.

If a coworker's habitual lateness is having a direct negative impact on your ability to get your job done, that might be an indication that it needs to be addressed. First, try to kindly explain to the coworker the need you have for them to be on time, and see if that might work. But remember, unless you're the manager, you don't have the authority to demand anything from that person.

Isn't it interesting how something so small as this annoying habit can so easily turn into a real issue between two people and eventually lead to other, more major problems. That's because we dwell on these little things, allow them to occupy too much thought time, and develop an attitude pretty quickly.

If you are powerless to either change or address this annoying habit of a coworker, then it's time to let it go. Colossians 3:13 tells us to "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Just let it go—it won't kill you!

### Day Three

Annoying bad habits of coworkers can start to drive you crazy! I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. These are not major issues—just little things that can become real stumbling blocks to good working relationships. We need to know the best way to respond to a coworker with an annoying habit, and more importantly, make certain we get rid of any of our own annoying habits.

So, here's the third annoying habit: The coworker who tends to gripe and complain a great deal. This can be terribly annoying and if you're not careful, they can bring you right down to their level and you'll find yourself griping and complaining more than you should.

One negative person can poison the atmosphere where you work. It only takes one. If you happen to work with that one person, you must first learn how to tune them out and not allow their negative talk to infiltrate your own mind. Then remember that a person's attitude is always their choice, and we don't have the power to change anyone else's attitude. So, if your coworker chooses to gripe and complain a great deal, your best way to deal with it is to respond in positive ways. Do it nicely, kindly, but firmly—don't be afraid to be positive in the presence of a person who is negative.

And of course, pray for that person. Underneath that negative exterior is something else that is causing the problem. You may never know exactly what that is; it could be baggage from childhood. But you can still pray that God will help you to respond in kindness, to have sympathy for that person, to show them mercy and grace even when you don't want to.

It is in these small issues of life that we have the greatest opportunity to demonstrate God's love. Maybe not in words or by quoting scripture, but simply by remaining joyful and peaceful even when dealing with an annoying negative coworker.

Have you ever thought about your own tendency to be negative? Years ago I finally began to pay attention to my own negative attitude, and realized I was far more negative than I thought I was. I heard myself saying lots of negative junk in any given day, and I began to monitor my own attitude. It's a very good habit to form—to just make sure you haven't caught the negative disease yourself.

## Day Four

What is the most annoying habit of a coworker that you've had to deal with on your job? Well, that's the way life is sometimes, right? So how should a Christian respond to these annoyances? We've looked at several annoying habits already. Now, here's another one:

It's the coworker who interrupts you continually, sometimes for work-related issues, sometimes not. But the interruptions are often unnecessary, and they definitely impact your productivity—as well as annoy you.

There's no doubt that one of our major time wasters is interruptions. Every time we start and stop what we're doing, we lose time. So, you need to think of creative ways to eliminate these unnecessary interruptions.

First, determine if you're doing something to encourage the interruptions. For example, when they walk by your desk or office, don't look up and give eye contact, which can invite a trivial interruption. And if that candy dish on your desk is too inviting, you may need to remove it.

Secondly, for necessary interruptions with work-related questions, it might be helpful to establish a daily time for interaction. You might suggest that the two of you get together first thing each morning to go over the day's agenda. Frankly, managers can be the worst interrupters, and you could even suggest to your manager that an established daily meeting could save both of you lots of time—just to set the agenda and go over questions for the day.

Or you may have to become a bit more assertive, and simply say to the habitual interrupter, "You know, I just don't have time to chat right now. Can we talk later?" That's much nicer than showing annoyance through body language or harsh words.

Obviously, this is not a major issue. It's just an annoyance. But these little things can start to add up and before you know it, you have a major issue on your hands. So, think of a positive, pleasant approach to try to change that annoying habit, but don't let it cause you to respond poorly.

Paul wrote to the Colossians: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6). In responding to annoying people, we want to make this our objective—to be gracious and kind.

## Day Five

Do you remember the famous quote from Charlie Brown? "I love mankind; it's people I can't stand." Well, sometimes life seems that way, doesn't it? As Christians we are to love the world, and we do things to help mankind all over the world. But what about the people, the individuals, you have to work with everyday? They can be a lot more difficult to love.

That's because we all have annoying habits that can start to grate on people's nerves, and we've been looking at some of the annoying bad habits of coworkers this week. For example, suppose you work with someone who is always in crisis mode and frequently asks you to "do them a favor" and bail them out. But the reason they're in crisis mode so often is because they procrastinate and put everything off until crunch time. Are you supposed to continue to go the extra mile and "do them a favor," as they ask?

In Matthew 5 Jesus exhorts us to turn the other cheek and go the extra-mile. There's no question that Christians are supposed to do more than they have to do. So, on occasion when your coworker needs an extra pair of hands to get a job done, you should be willing to do that. But I don't believe Jesus intended for us to go extra mile after extra mile. That would lead us to becoming enablers, making it

possible for others to shirk their own responsibilities, and that is neither right for us nor for the other person.

So, with that crisis-mode coworker, you might say, “I’ll help you this time, but in the future, you can avoid this last-minute crunch by . . .” and then explain how it can be avoided, making it clear that you won’t be available to help with every crisis they have. Again, these words need to be spoken in love, from an attitude of helpfulness, not annoyance.

You know, so often it’s the way you say things that makes all the difference, and you could help this person break a bad habit of procrastination by combining a willingness to help with a little softly-given advice. Who knows; they might even listen and learn.

Remember, no one is in your life by accident, not even the annoying coworker. And we are called not only to love mankind, but to love the individual who can be annoying!