

Principles for Difficult Relationships

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Day One

Relationships are the sandpaper of life. Isn't it often true the relationship struggles of your life are used by God to refine and teach and help you grow to maturity? I want to examine five biblical principles we need to know when we are experiencing relationship difficulties on our jobs.

The Extra-Mile Principle

We are called to have an extra-mile attitude in our relationships with others. Matthew 5:38-41 is pretty clear about this.

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles (Matthew 5:38 – 41).

What does it mean to have an extra-mile attitude, to turn the other cheek, to give your cloak as well as your shirt? Jesus was trying to teach us:

- to endure unfair treatment at times, without griping or complaining.
- to refrain from saying some of the things we would like to say to that difficult coworker.
- to do some work we don't have to or want to do.
- to put in extra time and effort to help a difficult person.

Surely that is all a part of this extra mile principle. And it would lead you to endure at times and to do more than perhaps even your employer would require or expect of you. But there is also a balance we must find. I believe Jesus gave us boundaries with this extra mile principle, and he is not teaching us to endure any unacceptable behavior or habits forever and never say anything negative to anyone.

Do you go the extra mile with difficult relationships? When we are willing to, it can often open a door for a miracle.

Day Two

I am looking at some biblical principles which give us guidance when we have to deal with a difficult relationship—like a coworker who is lazy, uncooperative, negative, to name a few.

The "Speak-the-Truth-in-Love" Principle

Ephesians 4:14-15 gives us a very important principle:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4:14-15).

According to the Apostle Paul, speaking the truth to people is sometimes a way we can help them grow. Of course, the operative word here is “love.” Have you ever spoken the truth in haste or anger, hatred or vindictiveness, or with malice or in defensiveness?

The truth can often be very painful. When we speak it in anything but love, we can open a door that never should be opened and cause a rift in a relationship that may never be healed.

Which would describe you best?

- Would you say you have difficulty speaking the truth in love even when you know you should? If so, is that because you hate confrontations or fear rejection or repercussions? Or perhaps you feel guilty since you know you’re not perfect either.
- Or would you say you speak the truth too freely and often without compassion or forethought?

In practicing this biblical principle of speaking the truth in love, you need to exercise extreme caution. Words are very powerful and need to be bathed in prayer. Your motivation must be carefully scrutinized to make certain you are speaking the truth in love for the right reason at the right time.

However, remember speaking the truth in love is a biblical principle, and when God puts you in a position to speak that, failing to do so is to rob the person of an opportunity to become more mature.

Day Three

Do you have any enemies? Enemies are people who make your life uncomfortable, difficult. They may cause unnecessary hurt or discord, and they are generally at odds with you in many ways, intentional or unintentional.

The "Love Your Enemy" Principle

Here is a principle from Matthew 5 that gives us direct guidance on dealing with a relationship “enemy.”

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:43-45).

What a revolutionary teaching this was. Never before had anyone taught such convoluted doctrine. It goes against all our instincts to love our enemies. It demands an attitude foreign to our nature. It requires self-denial, which seems imminently unfair and all but impossible.

That’s the way it often is with biblical principles. They go against our grain, but if you have some relationship “enemies,” God will empower you to love them if you are willing. Remember, loving doesn’t necessarily mean liking. This kind of love is an action, a set of our will, a decision to act in loving ways, even though our feelings may not be warm and fuzzy.

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you (Proverbs 25:21-22).

In these two passages from Matthew and Proverbs we learn three things about how we are to treat our enemies:

1. We are to love our enemies.
2. We are to pray for our enemies.

3. We are to give our enemies what they need.

We aren't promised our enemies will change or appreciate our loving attitude. But when we respond in loving ways toward people who make our lives difficult, we keep ourselves from sinning and we demonstrate the love of Jesus in very real ways.

Day Four

Have you ever worked with someone who was arrogant? A person who tried to tell you what to do and had delusions of grandeur? I'm examining some of the difficult relationships you may encounter on your job. As I've noted, one of the many purposes of difficult relationships is to teach us needed and important lessons. And humility is certainly an important lesson we can learn through an arrogant coworker.

The "Humble Yourself" Principle

Jesus says:

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Luke 14:11).

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time (1 Peter 5:6).

Have you learned to look for opportunities to humble yourself? Now, I'm not talking about false humility, such as running yourself down, refusing to accept a compliment, or walking around with your head hung low. Most every day we will find opportunities to humble ourselves. For example, if you work with a bossy coworker, it is humbling to keep your mouth shut and not say something back to him or her. It is humbling to take his or her suggestion.

I began asking God to show me when and how to humble myself. It's a good prayer and I recommend it to you. I found that not insisting on my rights was a key way to humble myself; not talking about myself or my accomplishments was another. Not needing to have the last word is another good way to humble yourself.

But don't lose sight of the promises given to us when we truly are willing to humble ourselves. We will be exalted. Notice Peter said we will be lifted up *in due time*. That's probably not as soon as you would like it to be, but it will be in the right time after you have learned the valuable lesson of humbling yourself.

If you have a difficult person to deal with today, one who is arrogant or treats you in a condescending way, ask God to show you when you should humble yourself with this person. You'll be amazed at the blessing it will bring to you when you practice this principle. And humbling yourself is much easier than having to be humbled!

Day Five

I am giving you five biblical principles, which can help you when you're dealing with difficult people, particularly on your job. Today, our fifth and final principle is:

The "Speak Kind Words" Principle

Here are two verses from Proverbs that tell us how important it is to guard our words carefully and speak words of kindness.

Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up (Proverbs 12:25).

Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a ruling rightly given (Proverbs 25:11).

Rightly given words are those which are strategically selected and gently delivered. They fit the situation perfectly. With these words, you can change an ugly environment or situation into something beautiful—like *apples of gold in settings of silver*.

For example, suppose you had to confront a person on your job who is repeatedly late to work. Which of these two approaches would be rightly given words?

1. "I want to point out something that is bothering me. You've been late to work a lot, and it just drives me crazy. I want every person here on time every day. You're paid to be here on time, so I'll be expecting you to be on time every day from now on. I hope that is clear."
2. "I've noticed you have some difficulty getting to work on time. Perhaps there is some good reason for that; if so, you need to tell me so we can work it out by cutting your lunch time or having you work later each day. Is there some reason that makes it difficult for you to be here on time each day?"

The first example would cause a defensive, angry reaction and may or may not solve the problem, while the second approach shows some concern for the individual while at the same time making it clear tardiness cannot be tolerated. Those are rightly given words.

Often our choice of words makes all the difference in how responsive the other person will be.