

LifeMapSM



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

November 2011

This Month's Message:

A Co-Worker from Hell

Paths Forward

- Need Career Coaching?
- Tired of boring

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A Co-Worker from Hell

This month's LifeMap is a response to many confidential questions and e-mails I've received over the years. How do I deal with a colleague who is driving me crazy? Many folks have described their own "co-worker from hell" with words like angry, manipulative, aggravating, liar, aggressive,

meetings??

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like angry, manipulative, aggravating, liar, aggressive, pompous, confrontational, condescending and some I won't repeat here. Work is difficult enough these days without having to deal with someone who seems to be actively working against your success.

When we are attacked two immediate human responses are "fight or flight". Some aggrieved employees chose to "fight back". While those who know me best will say I am no shrinking violet, fighting back at work not only lowers you to your opponent's level it is often counter-productive in that some (perhaps without the full picture) will see you as the instigator of the problem. Other employees in this situation ask me is if it would just be easier and wiser to head out onto the job market to find another job away from this 40-50 hour a week source of stress and frustration. In some markets this may seem to be the easiest course. But in today's difficult job market this is not the case. To me it feels like capitulation and though, ultimately, it may be the best answer I have some strategies for you to try before you throw in the towel to get away from your co-worker from hell.

Paths Forward

- **Assess Your Co-Workers** It is not unusual for thoughtful, hard-working, committed, opinionated people to come into conflict when working together in teams. Most work conflicts can be resolved through a focus on common interests and goals. Frequent by-products of resolved conflicts include positive relations between team members, more effective teamwork and better results. When working with others it is not a matter of *if* conflict will arise, it is a matter of *when* it will arise. Observe your co-workers when conflict arises. How do they handle it? Is the focus on the work itself or personal issues? Are they upfront or sneaky? Are they bullying or truly focused on an important end result You won't always be able to predict from what angle a conflict will come but if you observe a co-worker who is prone to conflict you should be on your guard. Forewarned is forearmed.

- **Don't Make It Worse.** As I said above the "fight or flight" responses are immediate but they are not necessarily the best. For starters take some time to evaluate the situation. Remove yourself to someplace calm and quiet, jot down specific complaints, see if there are any easy solutions that you haven't considered. Ask yourself honestly is there are some ways that you are contributing to the problem. This is the time to act thoughtfully, not react rashly. You may well be angry, hurt or at the end of your rope but this is the time for

thought not reaction.

- **Don't Play Their Game.** Some folks just love conflict, confrontation and controversy. They thrive on it. Often they are using it to distract from poor performance. But whatever their reason (or genuine pathology) it is essential for you not to sink to their level and retaliate. You must realize that this is their game and they are better at it than you. Angry exchanges, personal comments or slights are like putting more fuel on the fire which makes them feel more powerful (and, thus, even more difficult to deal with). Take the exact opposite course!!

- **Always Be The Adult.** Listen to how children fight. They call each other names, they utter inane responses, they repeat themselves, they take cheap shots, they use personal insults, they blame the opposing party for everything under the sun and they whine about unfairness when it feels like they're losing. This is exactly the opposite of how to push back in an adult conflict. Being the adult means: standing firm, having a value-based or moral point of view, not letting your opponent under your skin, focusing on facts, being willing to negotiate points where appropriate, and maintaining conversational tone and volume. Sometimes this will cause your opponent to rise to your level and put resolution within reach.

- **Kill'em With Kindness.** Some folks just have no interpersonal skills. Some are sad souls looking for a friend. Some are like abused dogs who will growl and bare their teeth at friend and foe alike. Some are overwhelmed with difficult money, work, children, elder or health problems. These are not excuses to be a co-worker from hell but they darn sure can be the reason for it. Engage the better angels of your nature and see if reaching out in conversation and friendship can break down the wall of anger or bullying behind which is often fear and vulnerability. Hey, it could work! I've seen it happen. Sometimes the other person just gets frustrated or bored of hassling someone who won't take the bait and lays off the bad behavior. (I can't resist saying that in the event that killing'em with kindness doesn't work it may drive them a little bit crazy which is a bit of fun in itself.)

- **Ignoring It Won't Work.** One incident may be a fluke. Two incidents may be a coincidence. But three inappropriate conflicts with a co-worker from hell is proof positive that there's real problem that needs to be dealt with. *After* (and that's important) you've tried the above techniques with no

positive results then you need to start on a different course. Start by backtracking to previous events and document in writing as best you can the situations, the events, what was said, what was done, in what venue and what the results were. Now find out if other third parties have the same observations and whether they are willing to stand up and say so. Once you have tried to address this situation on your own it is now the time to bring the issue to your boss and / or your human resources representative as they are responsible for resolving any hostile workplace issues. Don't assume they will automatically be on your "side". They will try to assess the situation neutrally and may ask if or how you are contributing to it. Be open to their suggestions and remember that your goal is for all to work together productively (not all be great pals).

- Move On or Move Out. There are many possible outcomes to a management intervention with a co-worker from hell. He or she may be moved elsewhere in the organization or fired. Though these options may feel like you've "won" remember to be gracious in victory and do not speak ill of the absent party because (though you may think it's unfair) not everybody thinks you are without some responsibility for this situation. Redouble your efforts at building collegial relationships. It is also possible that you will be moved to a parallel position or perhaps even promoted. Again, the immediate problem has been removed so focus on moving your career forward. If, as sometimes happens, management is unwilling or unable to address your dilemma then, unfortunately, the time is nigh for you to start packing your parachute and planning for a job change. (Go to www.drpaulpowers.com, click on [LifeMap Archive](#), select 10/23/07 - *Pack Your Parachute - Now* or any of the many other editions devoted to job and career change.)

LifeMap is about making one's work life and career as productive, stress-free and enjoyable as possible.

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email drpaul@drpaulpowers.com

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personal success.

<http://www.drpaulpowers.com/speakingschedule.html>

Resources

· Are you or someone you know job hunting or thinking about it?

The best, concise, all-round job changing guide available. Revised Edition [Winning Job Interviews](#) by Dr. Paul Powers.

In this easy-to-follow, step-by-step book, Dr. Paul Powers demystifies job interviewing, explains why the process actually favors the job hunter, and shows how you can dramatically improve your interview skills.

Packed with solid, practical information and laced with both humor and "kick in the pants" motivation, *Winning Job Interviews* is the book you wished you had before your last interview... and is mandatory preparation for your next one!

· Stalled at work? Still struggling to find your true vocation?

Or know someone who is? Order your copy of [Love Your Job! Loving the Job You Have, Finding A Job You Love](#) by Dr. Paul.

<http://www.drpaulpowers.com/booksandarticles.html>

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