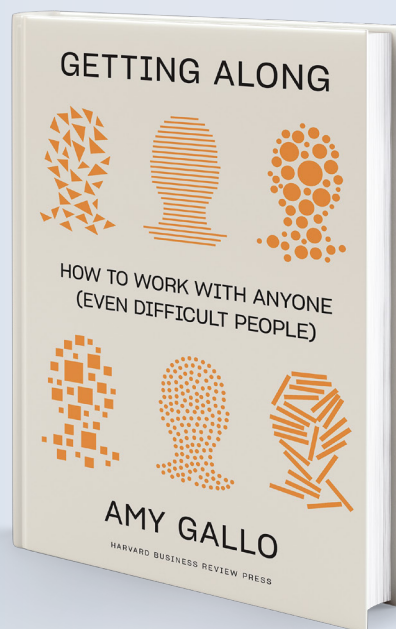


BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



Getting Along

How to Work with Anyone (Even Difficult People)

By Amy Gallo

Amy Gallo is a contributing editor at Harvard Business Review. She is the author of the HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict and a cohost of HBR's Women at Work podcast. Her articles have been collected in dozens of books on emotional intelligence, giving and receiving feedback, time management, and leadership. As a sought-after speaker and facilitator, Gallo has helped thousands of leaders deal with conflict more effectively and navigate complicated workplace dynamics. She is a graduate of Yale University and holds a master's from Brown University.

Navigating Your Toughest Relationships at Work

Most people who have been working for even a small number of years have had the experience of working with people they would prefer not to. Sometimes this is simply because of a difference of personality or style while other times it is because a co-worker exhibits toxic behaviors. In her book, *Getting Along: How to Work with Anyone (Even with Difficult People)*, author Amy Gallo seeks to help the reader associate difficult coworkers with eight archetypes. She then gives readers an understanding of each archetype, considerations to mull over as to the role the reader may be playing in the situation, and some dos and don'ts for helping improve relations with difficult people. She ends the book by giving guidelines and tips for how readers can care for their own physical and mental well-being in the midst of a difficult work environment.

Gallo begins her book with a discussion of why work relationships matter. She says that some of our most intense relationships can come from the workplace because of the sheer number of hours the average person spends at work. She then goes on to mention studies that claim the happier our work relationships are, the more engaged and productive we can be.

Difficult relationships can tax workers emotionally. Most people have not been explicitly taught how to deal with difficult people, and yet they expect themselves to be able to do so easily nevertheless. Difficult relationships can make people question who they are as people. Not only that, but Gallo explains how even small amounts of stress can affect decision-making. These relationships are consequential. One study found that 70% of the difference between the highest and lowest performing teams can be attributed to the quality of the relationships of the team members.

Gallo believes that most difficult colleagues can be sorted into one of the eight archetypes, but while these archetypes are important for helping to create strategies for improvement, the real benefit is when a person can develop hope that the relationship with their colleague can change and that there is even a possibility that they have misread the situation in part or in whole. Improving toxic work relationships is an important goal as Gallo explains that uncivil behavior in an organization can actually spread both within the work environment and outside of it.

The first archetype Gallo discusses is the insecure boss. While

some self-doubt can be helpful, it becomes problematic when it leads those in positions of authority to micromanage, criticize, and constantly seek reassurance. Insecurity is problematic at higher levels of management because insecure people in positions of authority tend to act more aggressively. Unfortunately these types of leaders often come down hard on others and resist listening to the feedback of others. Gallo asks readers to consider if an insecure boss is actually insecure or if another trait could be causing their behavior. She also asks readers to consider if they could be contributing to the problem. When trying to understand a boss's behavior, she suggests continually asking "why" until the employee can get a clearer understanding of why the boss is acting in the manner they are. Suggestions she has for people in this work environment are to first consider the pressures the supervisors face as this can improve empathy and understanding. She then suggests helping the supervisor succeed and communicating in terms of "we" as much as possible to gain the trust of the supervisor. She also suggests giving frequent compliments, but these compliments must be sincere in order to be believed. She then suggests helping the supervisor feel in control. This is because insecurity can actually increase micromanaging. Finally, she suggests employees keep a confidence folder where they keep a record of compliments and praise they have been given. This can help an employee stave off any dips in confidence that can occur as the result of working for an insecure manager.

The second archetype discussed is the pessimist. These are people who are all too happy to point out why a certain project or idea will not work. Pessimists not only believe bad things are inevitable, but they also believe they have little control over the outcomes. Gallo explains that multiple factors could be driving pessimistic behavior. These include anxiety, a desire for power, and resentment. Pessimism has a number of costs, and this type of outlook can also be contagious. To consider the reader's role in a pessimist's behavior, Gallo suggests considering what the sources of pessimism are, if the concerns are legitimate, and if they are problematic. To help alleviate the negative effects of pessimism, Gallo suggests reframing the pessimism as a gift that can help the organization determine risks. Along the same lines, she suggests possibly giving the pessimist the role of devil's advocate. Other tactics involve helping pessimists to challenge their assumptions, helping the pessimists understand why their behaviors help and when they hurt, and leaning into positivity while avoiding polarizing. Polarizing is when a person accidentally makes a pessimist dig in their heels because the other position is being pushed too hard.

The third archetype Gallo explores is the victim. She considers this to be a particular branch of pessimism. Victims often feel sorry for themselves, evade responsibility, and wallow in their feelings. When faced with a slight, a victim will often see it as proof of their own victimhood even when other people would just brush off the situation or fight back. As with the previously discussed behaviors, victimhood can be contagious. To better understand a victim, Gallo suggests examining whether the person in question is really being victimized. She also recommends trying to figure out what triggers a victim. The benefit of this is that it can help a person determine which tactics they can

use to improve the situation. One of the tactics Gallo suggests is to validate the feelings of a victim. Sometimes knowing that their feelings are validated is enough to stop the victim from complaining. She also suggests encouraging a victim to take responsibility and to recognize their own agency in situations. Gallo cautions the reader to protect themselves against victims because too often they can turn an entire team against one person if they feel they are being victimized.

The passive-aggressive peer is the fourth archetype. All too many people are familiar with passive-aggressive actions and tendencies in people. Some of the behaviors associated with passive-aggression are acting rudely and then denying it, promising to perform a task and not performing it, and twisting the words of the other party in an argument. Many passive-aggressive people are afraid of rejection; therefore, they do not specifically say what they want or need. Many people use passive-aggressive techniques in order to avoid conflict. Passive-aggressive behavior is often performed by people who do not have much power within a situation. Passive-aggression can hurt teams. One study showed that passive-aggressive organizations were only about half as profitable as similar organizations. To further understand the situation, Gallo recommends considering what is triggering the behavior and also whether the reader's own past history with passive-aggressive behavior could be tinting how they are viewing the situation. To help alleviate the situation, Gallo recommends people avoid labeling a person as passive-aggressive as this often leads to frustration. She then suggests having a conversation in which behavior can be discussed. She suggests avoiding email or text situations for such conversations. She also recommends getting input from other people as to whether they are witnessing the same behavior. If they are, they can then determine how to proceed together. She suggests always modeling the behavior you want to see.

The know-it-all is the next archetype Gallo explores. This archetypal person always believes they are right; they avoid sharing credit, and they frequently will not listen to criticism. Gallo explains the human tendency to believe that we are better at something than we are. People also tend to associate confidence with competence which may not be the correct judgment. She describes the phenomenon of mansplaining as a form of know-it-all behavior. Gallo says that many of the know-it-alls she has worked with in the past have acted in such a way to overcome incompetence. Working with a know-it-all can impede the confidence of those around them. To better understand the know-it-all, Gallo recommends considering what they are trying to prove, whether their confidence is justified, and whether the know-it-all is causing real problems or if the behavior is simply annoying. She provides numerous tactics to try in this situation. For a know-it-all who insists on interrupting, she suggests telling them beforehand that they would prefer it if they avoid interrupting. She references Kamala Harris's tactic during debates with Mike Pence as the woman simply said, "I'm speaking" when Pence tried to interrupt her. She also suggests asking for facts and data when a person believes the person they are speaking with may not actually be correct in their claims. As with other archetypes, she suggests modeling appropriate behavior.



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The sixth archetype discussed is the tormentor. Tormentors are classified as people who have had to suffer through hard situations in order to make it to where they are, and they expect those after them to suffer in the same way. To explain this archetype, she tells the story of a woman named Celeste who bragged about how little time off she took when she had children and how she started working right when she got out of the hospital. She asked employees to cancel vacations and work during honeymoons. As Gallo writes, “She made it clear that she hadn’t had it easy coming up in their industry, and she wasn’t going to smooth the way” for others. Often tormentors will assign negative characteristics to a generation of people, will deny systemic barriers, and will set impossible standards. She attributes a lack of empathy, envy, and social identity threat to this sort of behavior. She suggests coworkers in these situations consider whether the organization encourages such behavior. In order to help alleviate some of this behavior, Gallo suggests approaching the tormentor as a mentor. This can help increase the tormentor’s empathy. She recommends against getting into a power struggle with the tormentor as this could actually make the situation worse if the tormentor feels threatened.

The biased coworker is the next archetype discussed. Sometimes biased coworkers are explicitly offensive towards certain groups of people. This is often against company policy and is possibly against the law. Often the offenses are more subtle and are considered microaggressions. The recipients of this behavior and those around them have to determine how to respond. Gallo explains that perpetrators might subtly exclude people with their language and expectations. These can be based on assumptions made about groups of people. Gallo urges the reader to consider whether they were the victim of the aggression or a witness. She believes that “As a bystander, you should only choose to ignore a biased comment when your safety – or the safety of the person who has been targeted – is at stake.” She explains that there are some real risks with speaking up, but there are also risks to not speaking up. She recommends the reader, in these situations, decide when and how they should respond and also whether they should report it. She recommends trying to foster a growth mindset. She says that one helpful response in the face of a biased remark can be to ask questions. A person can ask the person why they made that assumption or the reasoning behind what they said. This can help the offending party come to the conclusion themselves that they have made an inappropriate remark. She recommends preparing for defensiveness but also labeling behavior what it is as necessary.

The last archetype Gallo presents is the political operator. These people are prone to taking undue credit, gossiping, hoarding information, and purposefully undermining others. Gallo draws

a distinction between good and bad office politics. To determine on which side a behavior lands, she suggests considering whether anyone is hurt by the behavior. When dealing with a political operator, Gallo recommends determining which behaviors are problematic and in which ways they are. For those with a competitive streak, she suggests avoiding getting pulled into competition with the political operator. She also recommends that the reader make their work known so others can see what they are contributing. She also believes that offering help to the operator and asking for advice from them can help turn around behavior. She has specific strategies for particular types of political operators such as liars, gossips, and credit stealers.

Once she has finished discussing the individual archetypes, Gallo goes on to explain principles that are helpful in dealing with anyone. Many of these revolve around the reader’s own mindset and perceptions and work to help the reader see more aspects of a situation while developing an awareness of their own biases. She advocates for staying curious about the behavior of others and experimenting to find solutions that work. Gallo then closes out her book with discussions on how people can properly care for themselves in difficult work situations.

Gallo’s book attempts to help people find at least partial resolution to their difficult relationships at work. She does not advocate leaving a work situation as the first solution. Instead, she suggests employing the aforementioned techniques as well as many others discussed in her book to at least help alleviate some of the difficulty. She believes that most of the problematic people in work environments fit into one of the eight archetypes, but she provides tactics that can work for all sorts of people, even those difficult to classify. People spend so much time at work that quality professional relationships are a worthy goal to pursue.

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