



## What if You Just Don't Respect Someone?

*All of us at some time or another will deal with an individual for whom we have little or no respect. Is it possible to develop respect for someone despite your current notion? Will you ever be able to maintain your sanity and improve your relationship?*

**Q:**

I know you have said that it is important that we have respect in order to hold a REAL conversation, even if it is to simply reverence the uniqueness of each individual. However, I work for a manager that I could never respect. I don't respect her personally because I know a lot about her personal life, and I don't respect her as my manager because of how she treats others and me. She's also a very poor leader; in fact, a number of people in our department agree with my perspective. How can I develop respect for someone like this?

**A:**

This is a great question because each of us at some time or another will deal with an individual for whom we have little or no respect. Unfortunately, when we don't respect a person, we go out of our way to avoid that person. Or if we are in a work relationship, we may still avoid them, suffer the frustration of having to deal with them, or give up—stay in the job and continue to make ourselves miserable.

Eventually, you will have to decide what you will do to improve your situation if you want to maintain your sanity and improve your relationship. Remember, it is important to improve respect because of the impact that respect has on both the relationship and results.

There are a number of tactics you can employ that will improve your current situation.

### **Look for the Positive**

A number of years ago when I practiced law as a criminal defense attorney, I always had

a difficult time dealing with one particularly obnoxious prosecutor. To put it mildly, the guy was a “grandstander.” In short, he was the kind of person who did everything to make himself look better than everyone else. That's right—he was a real showboat!

One day, another attorney pulled me aside and stated, “I've noticed that every time you have to deal with Ed, you let him get under your skin. I recommend that you find something you really like about him, even if it is the color or choice of his tie!”

“Why?” I asked.

“I believe that, on some level, people pick up on what we think and feel about them. So if you'll just hold a positive thought in your mind while speaking with him, I believe your interactions will be much smoother,” he offered.

At first, I thought my friend had attended one too many “power of positive thinking” seminars. But I decided to follow his suggestion and was shocked at the results. Although the prosecutor didn't give up being a “showboat,” he became more calm and rational in his demeanor and dealings with me, particularly in a courtroom in front of a jury.

You think you can hide or mask what you say to a person, but you really can't. Negative thinking leads to negative feelings. Negative feelings lead to negative words and actions.

All that you think about your manager comes out in your expression toward her. On some level, she picks up on your immense dislike for her. And, it is totally possible that



the disrespect she displays to you is a reflection of the disrespect you portray to her. Every one of us dislikes something about the people in our lives. Find something positive or admirable about your manager and focus on the positive.

### **Manage Your Emotional Energy**

I noticed you said that “a number of people in your department” share your contempt for your manager. Have you ever noticed that when you tell a negative story repeatedly, your emotions become more and more amped up? It’s almost as if the continual feeling of the story increases the drama we hold and the feelings we have. Then we become even more frustrated and emotionally exhausted in this process.

I would recommend that you avoid talking to others about your feelings and complaints and look for the opportunity to speak with your manager about your concerns. Talking to others just fuels the fire of your feelings, which drains you and those who listen to you. Also, if you are talking about your manager behind her back, you are probably leading other people to think that you would talk about them behind their back. You don’t want to do that.



### **Find Common Ground**

A colleague told me about a couple that approached him and asked him if he would help them to have a “good divorce.” He told them that no divorce was ever a “good divorce.” They stated, “Make no mistake, we are getting a divorce. We just don’t want to become mortal enemies in the process. Will you help us?”

He replied, “My first recommendation would be to identify some common ground.”

They quickly answered, “We have no common ground except for the fact that we hate each other!”

Wisely, he responded, “What about the nine-year old and the twelve-year-old that you created together?”

From there the conversation took a different turn. Sometimes we are so wrapped in our emotions and our thinking that we don’t take the opportunity to look for common ground. Common ground would include the values that are important to both of you. You need to defuse the emotion in this situation, unbundle or separate the values in the problem, and then address each of those values separately and arrive at a solution to remedy the situation.

### **Forgive the Foibles**

We all have weaknesses. Your manager’s weaknesses belong to her and her alone. I wouldn’t spend any more time carrying “the baggage” of her weaknesses around. Forgive her and move on. Forgiving her will free you emotionally and open a space for a number of wonderful opportunities that will flow to you.

In summary, look for the positive, manage your emotional energy, find common ground, and forgive this person. Still, better yet, you need to hold a REAL conversation with her. Doing so will increase your growth and development on many levels.

