Dealing with Difficult Co-Workers

Julie Jansen, author of "You Want Me to Work with Who?" discusses difficult co-workers, and offers advice on how to get along with them.

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LESTER HOLT, co-host:

How do you deal with a difficult co-worker? Julie Jansen is the author of "You Want Me To Work With Who?" And she's here with some advice.

And, Julie, good morning to you. Good to see you.

Ms. JULIE JANSEN ("You Want Me To Work With Who?"): Good morning, Lester.

HOLT: You know, I watched that, and I'm always thinking we're talking about difficult co-workers like what if you're the one? What if you're the difficult co-worker? But let's talk about--you say that the--obviously the inability to get along with folks causes a lot of problems, especially productivity in the office. And you say that there are five reasons why people can't get along at work. This--the first is very simple, that people are difficult.

Ms. JANSEN: Well, you joke, but we all are difficult at times. We all exhibit bad behavior and have traits that other people find irritating or just can't deal with.

HOLT: You know, I watched that, and I'm always thinking we're talking about difficult co-workers like what if you're the one? What if you're the difficult co-worker? But let's talk about--you say that the--obviously the inability to get along with folks causes a lot of problems, especially productivity in the office. And you say that there are five reasons why people can't get along at work. This--the first is very simple, that people are difficult.

Ms. JANSEN: We are. I mean, employers do talk about teamwork...and then that creates competitive behavior and that creates people problems.

Ms. JANSEN: Yeah.

HOLT: ...but really we're judged on what we bring to the table.

Ms. JANSEN: We are. I mean, employers do talk about it a lot, but then they incentivize and pay people as individuals and then that creates competitive behavior and that creates people problems.

HOLT: The last two are interesting because it reminds us that we have lives outside the office. You say people have personal problems and people are complex.

Ms. JANSEN: Yeah.

HOLT: And--and these are things we don't often see what's happening in somebody's personal life.
Ms. JANSEN: Well, people are individuals first and employees second. So they bring all that stuff to work, their problems and their communication styles and their different personalities, and that'll, you know, create havoc.

HOLT: In your book, you list 11 keys to what you call a stress-free, satisfying and successful work life, no matter who you work with. Let me go through them very quickly. You say confidence, curiosity, decisiveness, empathy, flexibility, humor, intelligence, optimism, perseverance, respect and self-awareness. Now, you ask readers to understand which of these characteristics they possess.

Ms. JANSEN: Yeah, and it's--using those keys are tools to help someone assess themselves, assess how they can develop a functioning immunity to other people and how they can assess other people and get along with them better.

HOLT: So again this comes back to the notion that you might be the annoying co-worker here, or the difficult one, so it's almost...

Ms. JANSEN: Yeah.

HOLT: ...a self-assessment kind of a process.

Ms. JANSEN: It is, it is. And a relationship can't change unless both people change, as we well know.

HOLT: What's the most important key to a--to a stress-free work life, of those--of those I listed?

Ms. JANSEN: I would say self-awareness. It's the 11th key, but that's because they're alphabetical. Self-awareness, if you are not aware of how you are affecting other people, how your communication affects other people, then it's going to be really hard for you to change.

HOLT: And to what extent can you advocate with your employer because we talked about the fact that you're judged as individuals but teamwork is something that is normally valued, so at some point do you have to open up that dialogue.

Ms. JANSEN: Yeah, I mean that's what people don't do. They're either very passive or they're way too aggressive, and they don't realize they've got to have some sort of strategy for dealing with people.

HOLT: Do people's insecurities also sometimes manifest themselves as--as a difficult persona?

Ms. JANSEN: Yeah, I mean that's the confidence key. And so people, if they have low confidence, feel threatened, they're jealous, they're envious, and those things just don't create a happy workplace.

HOLT: And what about confronting? Is there any value in confronting someone, saying, `Look, the cubicle may look--we got to talk here because we're not--we're not doing the company any favors, we're not doing each other any favors?'

Ms. JANSEN: Yeah, I think it's having a civilized discussion, planning for that discussion, documenting it, giving behavioral examples, focusing on the work rather than the person or the personality.

HOLT: All right, Julie Jansen, all good advice. We do appreciate it.