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NEWSWORTHY

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## From the Team

Several years ago, reports of research from Sweden claimed that working with idiots was “one of the deadliest forms of stress” — more likely to give you a heart attack than fatty foods. The viral-inducing fake news was first published on the tongue-in-cheek *Weekly World News* (which offers “aliens” as a main topic on its website.) And though it was complete bunk, it posed a compelling question: how do you deal with coworkers who make you crazy?

In the intervening years, the problems haven't gotten better. In fact, they may have gotten worse. Add left/right politics to the difficult co-worker syndrome and sometimes it is hard to find joy in going to work. But not impossible. In fact we believe — with the right attitude and a disciplined approach to self-management — you can gain something from the experience. We've scoured the research and tapped best practices from the experts to share tips and tricks of dealing with “hairy situations” at work: sharing bad news, bridging the political divide, and generally dealing with difficult people.

We hope this is a good read for you, and that you're not actually facing these work challenges. For those who are, we hope it helps. And for those who have given up and are looking to move on, please call us!

*The Welsh & Associates Team*

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*You can always judge a man  
by the quality of his enemies.*

— Oscar Wilde



## Politics and the Office

According to a 2016 report by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), nearly three quarters of HR managers surveyed said their organizations discouraged political activities at work — everything from discussing politics to campaigning. But SHRM also found that just one-in-three organizations (and most of them big companies), had formal policies in place. More discouraging was this: among companies with policies in place, less than 1% reported disciplining employees for violating that policy. This includes HR telling those employees to knock it off. This doesn't mean HR isn't sympathetic to the problem, it's just hard to manage. Which means you must be your own best ally when it comes to these annoying colleagues. We offer a few suggestions in the next article.

## Annoying and Obnoxious Colleagues

According to research published in the book *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility Damages Your Business and What You Can Do About It*, authors Christine Pearson and Christine Porath found that

one-in-eight people leave an organization because of rude language or behavior from coworkers. The research also found that 80% of survey participants lost work time worrying about the way they were treated. And another 48% said they deliberately decreased how much or how hard they worked. The book provides strategies for organizations to create more civil work cultures, but what can employees do in the meantime? We have a few suggestions.

**1. Put the issue onto the table.** You can't address a problem that hasn't been identified. And it's possible the offender doesn't know his or her behavior bothers anyone. If you're not sure how to have this conversation, check out our article on delivering hard news.

**2. Try to see their perspective.** As the old adage goes, you never truly know someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes. Maybe that person always butting into your personal business is lonely. You may still not like them, even when you understand why they behave the way they do. But it may make it easier to tolerate them.

**3. Steer clear of the offender.** If your boss is open to it, try working a completely different schedule. At a minimum, take lunch at a different time. Move your work space somewhere else and avoid them in meetings.

**4. Ignore them.** When you can't avoid, try to ignore them. And if you can't do that, take your mom's advice and try to rise above the situation.

As a last resort, talk to HR. Why do this last? If the problem is strictly one of mismatched personalities or quirky behavior, there is little they can do. If talking to HR doesn't work and you find you're out of options, we're here to help you explore opportunities outside your current job.







## Tips for Delivering Bad News

No one likes to be the bearer of bad news. Whether it's as simple as telling your cubicle neighbor his or her lunch smell is offensive, or as difficult as firing someone, eventually bad news is something everyone has to deliver.

Keep in mind that how the information is received depends largely on you: the words you choose, the timing of your message and the tone of your delivery. Your relationship with the recipient and your reputation also factor in. In other words, if you're a constant complainer, that smelly-lunch colleague may not take your complaint seriously. On the other hand, if you're leader who demonstrates real concern for your employees, even firing someone can be seen as courageous and kind. And remember, 80% of all communication is nonverbal — so consider your body language, too, and make sure it mirrors what you say. Here is some additional advice we found from the field:

**Tone is more important than what you say.** Stephanie Vozza, writing for *Fast Company*, reported on a study from Saarland University in Germany. The research was based on 400,000 cases of employees who were laid off. The report found that employees were more likely to be confrontational when managers used an aggressive tone. We weren't surprised.

**Be clear and concise to avoid misunderstandings.** Certified career coach, speaker, author and freelance blogger for *U.S. News*, Hallie Crawford, says, "Don't beat around the bush." A long preamble can confuse your listener. She suggests practicing out loud what you plan to say so you become comfortable with the message. When you hear the words first, you can soften or strengthen the message if needed.

**Consider the receiver's perspective.** Writing for *Inc. magazine*, journalist Will Yakowicz's research found that it's important to remain open and to see the situation from the other person's perspective. If you're addressing a conflict with a colleague, seeing things from another point of view may help you find common ground and ultimately, a solution that satisfies you both. If you're giving a bad performance review, a little compassion can go

a long way. But be careful not to confuse compassion with emotion, Yakowicz adds.

## Meet Our Team



Anne Charette joined W&A in March as a designated "utility player." She brings with her a broad set of skills that enable her to step into almost any task or project. This skillset, combined with a willingness to help out when and where she's needed, makes her an invaluable asset to our team.

Anne's experience includes work as an internal recruiter for a large industrial company. This gives her a first-hand perspective of the talent-related needs and challenges facing employers. She also worked for a large, multinational search firm. From this, she gained a deeper understanding of what employees are looking for in an ideal job.

"Both were great experiences," Anne says, "but they were large companies. I wanted to work for a small business where I can make a more direct and immediate impact. I'm also better able to understand the industry dynamics that are driving what our clients need because I live here. And I can tell candidates about the great quality of life that Southwest Michigan offers."

As the daughter of a military dad, Anne moved around growing up. She had at least five different addresses in the U.S. before finishing high school in Naples, Italy. But both her mom and dad had roots in the Kalamazoo region. It's where Anne's sister was living when Anne was looking to settle down and build her career. And it's the place where Anne met and married her husband, Andrew. The couple has an 18-month-old daughter named Alice.

