

Judging from the number of websites and books devoted to them, there are a LOT of difficult people in this world. I suspect difficult times resulting from budget constraints, increased expectations, and bad educational press are in large part responsible for creating difficult people in education.

Do any of library media specialist Luisa's difficult people sound familiar to you?

1. "I know the kids are at an important place in their research project, but this new game I've found is something I want them to do right now. I'm their classroom teacher and what I say goes!" Marty then glared at Luisa, just hoping for a response, as the class watched.
2. "Look at the kids I've been given this year," whined Pat. "I'm always assigned the lowest achievers, the biggest discipline problems, and the school board members' children. I just don't see how we can work together on the animals unit this year, Luisa. I am overwhelmed."
3. At lunch, everyone was talking about the work they needed to get done before the upcoming parent-teacher-conferences. "Must be nice to be a librarian and not have *anything* to do during those days," Bill said, looking right at Luisa.
4. Entering her classroom with an arm load of books which Luisa was ready to book-talk, Bobbie stopped her at the door with, "I'm sorry. I should have said something earlier, but don't have time for you today. I know I agreed to give you half an hour, but I have too many other things going on."
5. The principal wants Luisa to take an active role in making sure the students are making good use of technology resources. Every 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher except Milt has meet with Luisa to develop meaningful activities that use technology. Milt refuses to discuss any ideas with Luisa.
6. At a reading curriculum meeting, Luisa suggested that the entire school try a sustained silent reading period. Immediately Martha said loudly, "Look, we tried this ten years ago and all the kids did was screw around. There is no research to back any of this up. Phonics and basal readers are the only proven way to teach reading."

Since I myself have never been a difficult person with whom to work and one rarely runs into a difficult person in Minnesota, I found that I needed to read up a bit and find out what the experts\* say about such challenging people. Psychologists often use these terms like these to describe Luisa's teachers:

1. Marty is **Aggressive** and actively forces his viewpoint. He likes to blow off steam and attacks verbally. Returning the attack, doesn't help and makes Luisa look bad in the process, but asking Marty to explain calmly what he has to say and listening without emotion may calm him down.
2. Pat's a **Victim**, complaining she has been treated unfairly. Luisa should ask Pat for suggestions to improve her situation so she gets practice giving positive ideas. Luisa has to ask herself if she is being paid enough to be a therapist as well as a media specialist.
3. Bill is **Sarcastic**, using words as weapons. He destroys group harmony and causes resentment. Luisa can't let Bill get away with this behavior. She's got to be assertive enough to let him know that sarcasm is unprofessional, unproductive, and hurtful.
4. Bobbie is a **Yay-sayer** who will go along with anything just to gain approval or avoid conflict. This means she often makes more commitments than she can handle. Luisa needs to make sure she follows through on agreements. Getting a commitment in writing often helps.
5. Milt is **Withdrawn** with seemingly nothing to contribute. Rather than nagging Milt, Luisa should ask open-ended questions that require him to produce more than a yes or no answer. Patience is required with these folks.
6. Martha **Knows-it-All**. She's an "expert" who places small value on other people's ideas. Luisa can't let Martha intimidate her or let her take over a meeting, but should listen to her, try to benefit from her knowledge, and get others to offer divergent opinions.

Yeah, I know, working with people like these is easier said than done. But we need to view these folks as a challenge rather than as a road block to a great library program and an effective school.

Knowing how to run a good library is important; knowing how to work with even difficult people is essential.

**Resources:**

Brinkman, R. *Dealing With People You Can't Stand: How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst*. McGraw-Hill, 1994.

Branson, R. *Coping With Difficult People*. Dell, 1988.

Toropov, B. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Getting Along With Difficult People*. Alpha Books, 1997.