



## CHAPTER 4: GETTING ALONG WITH OTHER PEOPLE

Sure we've all met someone who seems instantly unlikable, but getting along with other people ultimately depends on *you*. Getting along with people is as simple as recognizing that they are as unique and important as you are. When you accept this, you will not feel threatened by others.

A good relationship with people is built on three values:

- Trust—the ability for people to rely on each other
- Respect—the condition of two people mutually valuing each other
- Empathy—experiencing someone's feelings as if they were your own

If you can incorporate trust, respect, and empathy into your interactions with other people, you will be on the fast track to getting along and getting ahead.

### Dealing With Difficult Classmates

Online learning is not unlike a traditional college or workplace with an abundance of diverse people and personalities brought together by a common educational or career goal. Just because your classmates are similarly interested in animals, cars, or literature doesn't mean you will have a great deal else in common. In addition to classmates who are easy to work with, you will also find difficult people. In order to get the best experience out of your online learning, everyone must cooperate. Here are three types of difficult people you may encounter in online learning and the advice for getting along with each one.

## **The Teacher's Pet**

You know a teacher's pet when you see one because you can't help wondering if this person has endless amounts of free time. In grade school, teacher's pets were characterized by bringing in an apple. In online learning, the "apple" is expressed by an overzealous need to volunteer for projects and post replies to the instructor on the class bulletin board. While class participation and volunteering are both excellent qualities of an online learner, filling the forums with posts like, "I agree!" and "Great idea, professor!" makes your peers have to browse through brown-nosing just to get information.

### ***The Remedy***

Ignore the teacher's pet. Have faith that the professor, who may base a significant amount of your grade on class participation, can tell a thought-out, useful post from a brown-nosing post. It's a little known fact, but teacher's pets are often also irksome to teachers themselves who have spent years in the field dealing with this archetypal personality. So, instead, focus on yourself. Communicate with your classmates and teachers, volunteer for projects that catch your interest, and participate regularly in class discussion. This will impress the teacher more than that apple.

## **The Disappearing Act**

As a student, you either love or loathe group projects. Some of this may have to do with your personality type and preferred learning environment. But group work is a part of online learning and at some point, a group project will cross your path. The Disappearing Act is a person who is in your group, but fails to fulfill his or her end of the bargain. It may be that The Disappearing Act has lots of excuses—health, work, or family problems have suddenly come up. While such reasons can be valid, The Disappearing Act causes other members of the group to work longer and harder to cover the project.

### ***The Remedy***

Plan the project with time management and delegation. Before embarking on a group project, have everyone in the group get out a calendar and scan it from the date of the assignment to the deadline. Prior commitments and obstacles should be identified up front and the project organized around them. Group work does not have to be completely equal. One of your group members may have more time than another who works two jobs. Another of your group members may enjoy and excel at online searches and want to do the lion's share of the research. Group work should be delegated according to the group member's time, interest, and expertise. If after all this, you still have A Disappearing Act, you should attempt to contact and reorganize the workload with this person. No one wants to feel like someone else's secretary or that they work hard while someone else gets credit. Only after repeated attempts to sort the project out with The Disappearing Act should you get the instructor involved.

## **The Complainer**

There's always one person in a class who can't find anything about which to be happy. If the complainer is not complaining about the class itself, he or she is complaining about jobs, politics,

family, and the weather—you name it. Of course a certain amount of complaining is natural. Complaining can lead to camaraderie, even, but incessant negativity can bring a whole class down.

### ***The Remedy***

Don't enable the complainer. The complainer isn't looking for advice or solutions, so engaging him/her will just lead to further bellyaching. Change the subject a few times, and your classmate should get the hint. You don't have to go to class with a permagrin, but having a positive attitude will help you get ahead.

### **Dealing With Difficult Instructors**

Instructors are not always without their shortcomings. Some online instructors have lives as full as their students: with fulltime jobs in their fields, families, and other commitments. While reputable, accredited online colleges have excellent faculties backed by credentials, personality differences can still arise. Before you try to get out of a class to escape a teacher you don't like, here are a few things you can try to make a difficult relationship work:

- **E-mail the instructor to communicate what you're feeling.** The instructor may have no idea that you feel you need more guidance or don't like the policy of making grades public on the class forum. Express your feelings and see if you can work it out.
- **Focus on the instructor's knowledge base.** You enrolled in the class to learn, not necessarily to make a friend. Personality differences exist, but don't let them get in the way of your education. Concentrate on the knowledge base that the instructor brings to the class.
- **E-mail other students in the class.** The purpose of this e-mail isn't to complain or gossip, but rather to see how your peers are handling this difficult instructor. Maybe they have tips on how to get along better. Students who have had the instructor before may have insight into the instructor's expectations.
- **Most online colleges have counselors.** As a last resort, if you still can't get along, make an appointment with the school counselor. Discuss your problems and attempts at resolution. If necessary, the school may have a third party act as a mediator to help solve the difficulty.