

# ART119

leadership series

## MANAGING DIFFICULT PEOPLE IN EXERCISE CLASSES PART I: THE HOSTILE/AGGRESSIVE

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**THE BOOK, “COPING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE,” WRITTEN BY DR. ROBERT BRAMSON, IDENTIFIES PERSONALITY TYPES THAT ARE HARD TO GET ALONG WITH.** Although they constitute only about ten percent of the population, they account for over fifty percent of social-interaction stress. As a fitness leader, it is important to understand, recognize, and have tools to manage the difficult people in your classes and sessions. Managing rather than avoiding or ignoring will make you a more effective leader. Learning to work with them and welcoming them as your clients rather than becoming frustrated by them will enhance your reputation as a professional.

### **A DIFFICULT PERSON IS SOMEONE WHO DEMONSTRATES HABITUAL TROUBLESOME BEHAVIOR THAT EFFECTS MOST PEOPLE THEY CONTACT.**

Their behavior is a learned habit that they continue because it works for them to get what they want. Their behavior tends to undermine everyone’s self-confidence and motivation, leaving a feeling of helplessness and frustration. Effectively managing these situations is important not only for you but also for your other clients.

**ACCORDING TO BRAMSON, THERE ARE SEVEN TYPES:** The Hostile/Aggressive, the Complainer, the Silent Unresponsive, the Secret Agreeable, the Negativist, the Expert Know-It All, and the Indecisive. A difficult person may demonstrate one or a combination of these behaviors. The goal of this information is not for you to change the behavior but rather learn to deal with it and improve the situation so that you can go on with the business of teaching/training. This article (part I) will discuss the Hostile/Aggressive personality. The other difficult types will be discussed in ART120 - *Managing Difficult People in Exercise Classes - PART II – Six Types.*

**THE HOSTILE/AGGRESSIVE PERSONALITY TYPE** is the most difficult. There are four types of Hostile/Aggressives: the Openly Aggressive, the Interrupter, the Pot-Shot-Sniper, and the Exploder.

**THE OPENLY AGGRESSIVE** tends to intimidate by using strong language that attacks you personally. You might hear phrases like, “This is a stupid exercise,” or “The person who made up this choreography is an idiot,” or “These exercise balls are really dumb,” or “What kind of moron would do this.” Their arrogance can evoke anger.

The first step in dealing with Openly Aggressive personalities is to stand up to their comments in a calm and friendly manner. Never argue or criticize the comments or say they are wrong. They like to be right and may even try to get even to prove a point. Always call them by name. Then, in a calm and friendly tone of voice, say things like “Sue, I disagree. In my opinion....,” or “Joe, it looks like we see it differently...”, or “Mrs. Smith, why don’t you tell me more about what’s on your mind.” Listen and be calm. Initiate an objective conversation but be prepared to be interrupted.

**THE INTERRUPTER** has a quick mind. Follow through in a friendly confident manner by saying, “Mrs. Smith, you interrupted me.” Then, continue your point. If you get interrupted again say, “Mrs. Smith, you interrupted me again. I understand how you feel, just allow me to finish.” Then, continue your thought. The Interrupter needs YOU to earn their respect by YOU being strong. Once that happens be prepared to be friends and best buddies.

**THE POT-SHOT-SNIPER** likes to “jab” with comments hidden in seemingly innocent statements or under the cover of a joke. The victim, usually but not always present, allows the comments to continue as if nothing is wrong because the comment is so well camouflaged in the conversation. Everyone either ignores it or laughs. For example, you are teaching a class, and a difficult student says to the other class members, “I think I’ll do my own version of these moves. You need to be a contortionist to do hers.” Or, a class member says, “Boy those upper body weight exercises were good” and the difficult class member says, “Yah, if you want to break your arm!” It is important to take away the “snipers” power so that the behavior does not continue.

Talk to the Sniper after the workout when you can be alone. Directly confront the Pot-Shot with a comment. “Kathy, do you remember when you said you had to be a contortionist to do my choreography. I thought I heard a dig. Did you mean it that way?” This takes away the camouflage. She may answer by saying, “Oh, I’m sorry, I really didn’t mean it.” However, she may try another attack by saying, “Oh you’re too sensitive. Can’t you take a joke?” It is important not to let the second comment go but to call the Sniper on it every time. You might say something like; “I know you said it as a joke, but I thought I heard a dig, and I thought I just heard another dig about me being sensitive. Did you mean it that way?” Once it’s in the open, it can be discussed.

**THE FINAL TYPE OF HOSTILE/AGGRESSIVE IS THE EXPLODER** who can be very scary. Yelling or even throwing things is a tactic learned in childhood and still works. He or she feel frustrated, helpless, and compelled to take action. Don’t let an Exploder get away with it. Respond calmly and look directly in his or her eyes. Allow the Exploder to run out of steam until he or she regains self-control. Suggest that the two of you talk in private after class. Hostile/Aggressive personality types might explode when a correction about exercise technique is given or if a certain type of exercise equipment or piece of music is used. They might throw down their sweat towel or kick the exercise step. Instead of feeling intimidated and afraid, think of them as big children. It is essential to get the facts and offer help in the moment. Tell them what you are going to do.

This will help them from feeling attacked. You might say; "I understand that this is really important to you. I want to hear what you have to say, but not this way."

Learning to cope with all four types of the Hostile/Aggressive personalities will prove to be an accomplishment that will contribute to your growth as a professional group exercise leader or personal trainer.

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## **ART119 QUIZ**

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- 1 - A difficult person's behavior is a learned habit.
- 2 - A difficult person is someone who annoys only you
- 3 - The behavior continues because it works for them to get what they want.
- 4 - As a fitness leader, it is better to ignore bad behavior rather than manage it
- 5 - The Hostile/Aggressive personality is the most difficult to manage.
- 6 - According to Bramson, there are seven types of Hostile/Aggressives.
- 7 - The Pot-Shot-Sniper tends to use strong language that attacks you personally.
- 8 - The Openly Hostile/Aggressive hides under the camouflage of jokes.
- 9 - The Exploder may yell or throw things.
- 10 - An effective response to the exploder might be to tell them what you are going to do and say; "I understand that this is really important. I want to hear what you have to say, but not this way."