

Your co-worker *is the real problem.*

Level: B2 — C1 Duration: 60 min Topic: business, workplace dynamics, communication

1 Warmer • Opening statements.

Witness pairs. 90 seconds per question. We need the truth, not the polite version.

1. Describe the most difficult coworker you've ever had — in one sentence.
2. When did you last roll your eyes at a colleague — and why?
3. Have you ever BEEN the difficult coworker? Be honest.
4. Is workplace conflict mostly about personality, or process? Defend your view.

2 Discussion • Be honest with yourself: are YOU the coworker everyone secretly complains about?

Trios • No deflection • 5 minutes • Bring evidence

3 Vocab • Meet the words

a credit-stealer	someone who takes credit for OTHER people's work
a passive-aggressive	someone hostile through silence, sighs, and pointed CCs
a micromanager	someone who controls every tiny detail of others' work
an over-promiser	someone who commits to far more than they can deliver
a chronic interrupter	someone who never lets you finish a sentence
a meeting hijacker	someone who derails every agenda to their own topic
a fence-sitter	someone who avoids taking ANY position to stay safe
a martyr	someone who LOVES telling everyone how overworked they are

4 Vocab practice • Fill in the gaps

credit-stealer • passive-aggressive • micromanager • over-promiser • interrupter • meeting hijacker • fence-sitter • martyr

1. Said "Per my last email" three times in one Slack thread. That's a ____.
2. Reformatted everyone's PowerPoint at 11 PM and emailed about it at 6 AM. Classic ____.
3. Promised to handle the client by Friday. It's Thursday. Hasn't started. Pure ____.
4. Took credit. Used 'we' for problems, 'I' for wins. Total ____.
5. Refused to vote — 'I see merit in both sides'. Textbook ____.
6. Posted on LinkedIn at 9 PM about how exhausted they are. Again. The ____ strikes.

5 Expressions • Five idioms

<i>to throw someone under the bus</i>	to blame a colleague to protect yourself
<i>to be on someone's last nerve</i>	to be the cause of their imminent breakdown
<i>to give someone the cold shoulder</i>	to deliberately ignore or freeze them out
<i>to vent (to someone)</i>	to express frustration in private, often at length
<i>to be a team player (sarcastic)</i>	to fall in line and never push back, ever

★ SURPRISE ★

Take a breath. *Just between us...*

A 2024 Gallup study found that 70% of office conflicts are between just 2-3 people in any team.

So statistically... it might really BE that one coworker. 🎬

6 Dig deeper • Now let's go deeper

1. When does a difficult coworker become a manager's failure? Where's the line?
2. Is HR designed to solve coworker conflict, or to protect the company FROM coworker conflict?
3. Why do we tolerate behaviour from senior coworkers we'd never tolerate from juniors?
4. Can you be a 'great person' AND a 'terrible coworker' simultaneously? Defend.

7 Agree / Disagree • Take a side. Defend it.

"If a coworker is bad enough to ruin your week, your real problem is your manager."

"Difficult coworkers exist mostly because they are tolerated by everyone else."

"Most workplace 'drama' is just people without enough work to do."

"Office conflict resolution should be a required part of every job interview."

8 This or That • Pick one. Defend it.

Address directly

OR

Go through HR

Vent privately

OR

Bottle it up

Confront the credit-stealer

OR

Document quietly

Stay loyal to your team

OR

Stay loyal to your principles

9 What would YOU do? • Scenarios. Be honest.

1. Your colleague presented YOUR strategy in the board meeting as their idea. Twice. Your boss is now praising them. Do you (a) call it out publicly, (b) email your boss privately, or (c) quietly start documenting? Walk us through your exact next move.

2. Your close friend at work is performing badly, ducking deadlines, and others have started complaining to YOU about them. They don't know. Do you say something — and at what point do you stop covering for them?

3. Your manager just told you: three colleagues have flagged you as 'difficult to collaborate with'. You're shocked. You disagree. But three is three. What do you ACTUALLY do — in the next 24 hours?

10 Sentence stems • Finish them

Silent work • 4 min • Be specific.

1. The coworker behaviour that bothers me MOST is

2. The kind of coworker I am at my BEST is

3. I become difficult to work with when

4. Something I should probably apologise to a coworker for is

5. A coworker I genuinely admire is (because)

11 Speak for 1 minute • Pick one. No notes.

1. Make the case AGAINST a specific coworker type. Convince the room they're the problem.

2. Defend a 'difficult' coworker. Argue what they bring that others don't see.

3. Build the case against YOURSELF. What kind of coworker are you, really?

12 Recall • What stuck?

No notes allowed.

Name 5 of today's 8 new words and 3 expressions.

You rocked *today*.

Every word you spoke. Every sentence you finished. Every risk you took.