

MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

I Can't Get Along with My Coworkers

How to Survive Eight Hours a Day
with People You Would Never Have Chosen



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRO	1
Chapter 1 - Maybe They're Not the Problem	7
Chapter 2 - You Do Not Need to Like Them.....	19
Chapter 3 - Stop Mind-Reading	32
Chapter 4 - Some People Really Are Difficult.....	42
Chapter 5 - Complaining Is Not a Strategy	54
Chapter 6 - Stop Trying to Win Every Interaction	64
Chapter 7 - Stop Overexplaining Yourself.....	76
Chapter 8 - Do Not Turn Work into a Personality Contest ..	88
Chapter 9 - Have the Conversation Earlier.....	101
Chapter 10 - Build Boundaries That Survive Monday	112
Chapter 11 - Say the Awkward Thing Clearly.....	126
Chapter 12 - Stop Becoming Everyone's Backup System .	140
Chapter 13 - Stop Fighting by Email	155
Chapter 14 - Make Ownership Visible	169
Chapter 15 - What If They Do Not Change?	185
Chapter 16 - What to Do on Bad Days.....	200
Chapter 17 - Know When to Escalate	215
Chapter 18 - Stop Reopening Closed Cases	228
Chapter 19 - Catch It Before You Hate Everyone Again....	243
Chapter 20 - You Only Have to Work with Them	257

INTRO

It is 9:07 on Tuesday morning, and you have already had enough of Kevin.

Kevin has not technically done anything catastrophic. He has not set fire to the building, stolen your lunch, or announced that he is replacing you with an intern named Brayden. He has simply leaned over the divider and said, "Quick question," which is office language for "I am about to borrow part of your life and return it damaged."

The question is not quick. It is also not really a question. Kevin wants you to explain something you explained yesterday, in the meeting he attended, while he was looking directly at the screen with the solemn expression of a man receiving important information. Apparently, his face was present but the rest of him had gone somewhere quieter.

You answer anyway. You are a professional.

At 9:21, Nina sends you a message marked urgent. It is not urgent. At 9:43, Marcus replies—all to an email that did not need one reply, let alone forty-three witnesses. At 10:05, someone begins eating something at their desk that appears to have been cooked inside a defensive weapon. By lunch, one person has interrupted you four times, another has "circled back," and a third has used the phrase "low-hanging fruit" with enough confidence to suggest agriculture is now part of your job description.

You begin to wonder whether prison has decent Wi-Fi.

This is the strange thing about coworkers: you can spend more waking hours with them than with people you actually chose. Nobody asked you to select them from a catalog. You

got the job, they got the job, and now fate has placed all of you under fluorescent lighting with shared deadlines.

Sometimes the problem is obvious. One coworker is rude. Another takes credit for your work. Someone else treats every minor inconvenience as a constitutional crisis. There may be gossip, passive aggression, endless complaining, laziness, micromanaging, oversharing, or that impressive office skill of asking for help and then arguing with every suggestion.

But often nobody is evil. You simply do not like each other very much.

That can be harder than it sounds.

If someone is clearly terrible, your brain has a simple file folder: TERRIBLE PERSON. Efficient. But when someone is merely annoying in seventeen small ways, the brain opens a full investigation. Why does she phrase requests like commands? Why does he sigh before answering? Why does she write "as previously stated" as if submitting evidence to The Hague? Soon, the coworker is no longer just a person with habits you dislike. Every eye roll means something. Every delayed reply is suspicious.

Your brain starts producing office fan fiction, except nobody is attractive and the plot is mostly resentment.

The result is exhausting because you are not only doing your job. You are also monitoring tone, replaying conversations, composing brilliant responses you will never send, and explaining the situation at dinner while your partner slowly realizes Kevin has become an unpaid third person in the relationship.

The coworker may leave the office at five.

You take them home in your head.

That is where this problem becomes worth solving. Not because you need to love your coworkers. You do not. This book will not ask you to become spiritually united with Greg from Procurement. You do not need matching bracelets. You do not need to "see the divine light" in the person who repeatedly heats fish in the break room.

The goal is much more practical: to make other people at work take up less space in your nervous system.

You cannot control personalities. You cannot force someone to become self-aware by staring at them harder. You cannot make a chronic interrupter suddenly discover silence and use it recreationally. But you can get much better at handling the friction.

You can learn to separate genuine problems from ordinary personality differences, stop feeding minor annoyances until they become full-time enemies, and communicate boundaries without giving a forty-minute TED Talk called Why I Deserve Basic Respect. You can also recognize when the problem needs confrontation, documentation, escalation, or simply less emotional investment.

That last option is underrated.

Not every irritating coworker requires a strategy meeting. Sometimes the breakthrough is realizing that Linda's habit of saying "interesting" in a tone you dislike does not need to become your Tuesday.

This does not mean becoming passive. It does not mean smiling while someone dumps work on you, takes credit, insults you, sabotages you, discriminates against you, harasses you, or creates an unsafe environment. Serious misconduct is serious, and there are situations where a manager, HR, union representative, legal adviser, or another

appropriate professional should be involved. "Just ignore it" is not a universal solution. It is barely a solution to a car alarm.

But between "I love these people" and "I am updating my résumé from the bathroom stall" lies a large territory where skill matters.

A surprising amount of coworker conflict comes from expecting people to communicate the way we communicate and prioritize what we prioritize. They do not. Some people think out loud. Some need everything in writing. Some want small talk before business. Some consider "Hi" a waste of bandwidth and begin messages with a spreadsheet attachment.

One person calls this friendly.

Another calls it evidence.

The mistake is assuming that every difference is disrespect, every awkward interaction is hostility, and every annoying habit is a personal message addressed specifically to you. Sometimes it is. Often it is not. Learning the difference can save you hours of unnecessary anger and at least six imaginary arguments in the shower.

There is another uncomfortable possibility: occasionally, you are part of the problem.

I know. Terrible news.

You may avoid direct conversations, then grow resentful that the other person has not psychically detected the boundary. You may complain about a coworker to three people before saying one useful sentence to the coworker. You may insist that you "hate drama" while maintaining a detailed oral history of who said what during the Wednesday status meeting.

This book will not make you the villain. It will make you useful to yourself.

We are going to look at what actually makes coworkers so difficult, why certain personalities get under your skin, why avoidance often makes things worse, why overexplaining weakens boundaries, and how to respond to specific behaviors without becoming the office's unpaid conflict department.

More importantly, you will learn what to do in real situations: how to handle interruptions, passive aggression, chronic negativity, credit stealing, difficult feedback, boundary pushing, cliques, unequal workloads, awkward misunderstandings, and people who somehow turn "Can you send me the file?" into an emotional weather system.

You will also learn when to stop trying.

Some relationships at work can improve. Some can become functional. Some will remain mildly irritating until one of you changes jobs, departments, floors, or planets. Success does not mean every coworker becomes your friend. Success means you can work effectively, protect your energy, address what matters, ignore what does not, and go home without mentally bringing the entire department with you.

You do not need perfect colleagues.

You need better tools.

And possibly noise-canceling headphones, but we will treat those as infrastructure.

Continuing exactly from the series brief and the established stopping point: Chapters 1 and 2 only.

Wklejony tekst

Chapter 1 - Maybe They're Not the Problem

At 10:14 on Wednesday morning, you send a perfectly reasonable message to a coworker.

"Could you please send me the updated numbers when you get a chance?"

At 10:16, the reply arrives.

"Already sent yesterday."

That is the whole message.

No hello. No smiley face. No "sure thing." Not even the tiny emotional support animal of corporate communication: "Thanks."

You read it again.

Already sent yesterday.

Interesting.

The words themselves are harmless. Technically, they are information. Emotionally, however, your brain has already opened a courtroom.

Why did she write it like that? Was she annoyed? Was the word "already" necessary? It feels necessary only if the intention was to inform you that you are incompetent. Perhaps she has been waiting for this moment. Perhaps she has been maintaining a secret spreadsheet called Examples of Your Failure, and this message has just been entered into row 38.

By 10:22, you are no longer trying to find the numbers.

You are investigating punctuation.

This is how coworker conflict often begins: not with something enormous, but with interpretation. One person does something. You assign meaning to it. The meaning creates an emotion. The emotion influences your next response. The next response changes how the other person behaves.

Congratulations. A complete international incident has been built from seven words.

The first useful skill in getting along with coworkers is learning to separate three different things:

- what happened;

- what you think it means;

- what you feel about what you think it means.

Those three things regularly arrive in your head wearing the same coat.

What happened: Morgan replied, "Already sent yesterday."

What you think it means: Morgan thinks I am disorganized and wants me to know she thinks I am disorganized.

What you feel: irritated, embarrassed, defensive.

The problem is not that your interpretation is definitely wrong. Morgan may indeed be annoyed. She may also be in a hurry, bad at written communication, currently eating a granola bar while answering six messages, or one of those people who believes adding unnecessary words is a form of moral weakness.

You do not know yet.

That "yet" matters.

When you treat your first interpretation as confirmed fact, you begin responding not to the person in front of you but to

the version your brain has constructed. That version is usually less charitable, more strategic, and oddly committed to ruining your day.

Your brain is an excellent threat detector.

It is a less reliable HR investigator.

This becomes especially important at work because the environment is full of incomplete information. You see someone's email but not their morning. You hear their tone but not the phone call they had five minutes earlier. You know they missed a deadline but not whether three other people also changed the requirements halfway through.

We fill gaps automatically because uncertainty is uncomfortable. If a coworker walks past without saying hello, the brain does not enjoy leaving the file open under "Unknown." It prefers a conclusion.

"She's ignoring me."

Much neater.

Unfortunately, neat conclusions can create messy relationships.

Imagine you say good morning to Jordan near the elevator. Jordan gives a distracted nod and keeps walking. You think, Wow. Okay. Apparently we are too important to speak now.

Later, Jordan asks whether you finished part of a report. Because you are already irritated, the question sounds accusatory.

"Yes," you say. "Like I said I would."

Jordan hears the edge in your voice and thinks, What is their problem?

Now Jordan becomes colder.

You notice the coldness.

Evidence!

Within two days, both of you have successfully created the behavior you originally suspected.

This is not magic. It is a feedback loop.

The first person acts ambiguously. The second interprets negatively. The second responds defensively. The first reacts to that defensiveness. The second uses the reaction as proof that the original interpretation was correct.

Human beings can build surprisingly sturdy hostility out of materials nobody intended to provide.

This does not mean you should spend your career explaining everyone's behavior in the nicest possible way.

"He threw my laptop into the parking lot, but perhaps he is expressing himself differently."

No.

The goal is not endless generosity. The goal is accuracy.

Before deciding what a coworker's behavior means, ask a boring question:

What do I actually know?

Boring questions are underrated because they prevent exciting disasters.

You know Taylor interrupted you three times in a meeting. You do not yet know whether Taylor dismisses your ideas, interrupts everybody, gets overexcited, has poor conversational awareness, or was trying to keep the meeting from wandering into its fourth discussion about font size.

The behavior still matters.

The explanation is not yet settled.