

Get Your Grouch Potato Off the Sofa:

7.5 Ways to Deal with Challenging Moods in Clients, Co-Workers, or Even Yourself

Sometimes, after a long, hard day of work, I arrive home tired and cranky. I grab some leftovers and flop on the sofa. I flip channels. Commercial, commercial, political debate, kid's show, cooking show, a movie where the hero runs from 100 bad men who endlessly shoot at him, but miraculously never kill him. I say to myself, *This isn't how I want to end my day.* But I don't switch the station.

I'm mesmerized. I watch it until the end. I have indigestion and a restless night of sleep. Who knows if the movie caused that, but it certainly didn't help. Getting stuck in a bad mood can be the same way. It's like you're a grouch potato stuck on the "sofa of life" watching Negativity TV. Yet sometimes all it takes is a slight finger movement on the remote and your whole perspective on life can change.

We can all get grouchy from time to time. It's part of human nature. A negative mood is like bad weather: it comes and it goes and none of us is immune to its effects. If you go out on a stormy day, you are liable to get wet. There are, however, ways to change your experience of the storms within you and others.

Here are 7.5 quick tips that might help you get that grouch potato off the sofa.

1. Feel the rain but don't let it drown you

It sounds odd, but many people try to pretend it isn't uncomfortable and keep soldiering through the storm. They numb their feelings. All that does is make the negative energy fester inside you. Then it ends up coming out in ways that hurt you or others down the road. To let it go, acknowledge your discomfort first. On the other hand, raging at a storm doesn't make it go away either. Find a middle ground.

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For example, Jim repairs computers. Linda comes in with her laptop and says it needs repairing. Jim says he will assess it and get back to her tomorrow. She demands that he fix it right away. When he tells her he has a backlog of computer repairs, she calls him "slow and incompetent."

He takes some slow, deep breaths and counts to 10 before answering. He acknowledges his negative reactions but decides a defensive response will only escalate things.

2. Focus on the facts of the situation

Check your map, a weather report, look at the temperature, wind, etc. Find out as much as you can before taking any action.

For example, Jim asks Linda, "What leads you to make that assessment?" She

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responds, "I have brought in my computer repeatedly for the same problem. You obviously don't know what you're doing here. Each time it takes forever before I get it back. Do you think I can just sit around and wait while you play your computer games? I have a business to run!"

3. Summarize and restate in the positive

Shelter your eyes while you check out the whole sky and see if you can spot some sunshine. Ignore the accusations for the moment and make sure you understand the facts of the situation. Then, restate the concerns in terms of what the person wants.

Jim says, "If I understand correctly, you have brought this laptop in more than once for the same problem and need it fixed as soon as possible?" Linda responds, "Yes, please." His statement helps her calm down.

4. Find some shelter

If you are caught in a storm, get under an umbrella or a roof. This way you can assess the situation from a more detached (and less reactive) place.

For example, Jim tells her to wait a few minutes while he checks his schedule, her file, and the computer. He goes to his office and looks at Linda's file. He has notes from other employees that say Linda made accusations to them, too.

This helps him not take her comments personally. He notes that Linda dropped the computer and he realizes the damage is causing more problems than he originally thought. He checks his schedule and sees that he has no time to deal with it today.

5. Assign responsibility

Create a plan for surviving the storm. Acknowledge what part of the problem is your fault and take action to fix it. Then, ask the other party to take responsibility for his or her part.

Jim tells Linda that they improperly assessed the problem before and that they will fix it within two days. He offers her a laptop to use in the meantime. He also tells her that the age of the computer and the fact she damaged it contributes to the problem. He recommends she buy a new hard drive, which they will install for free. Linda is reluctant at first, but upon assessing the situation, agrees.

6. Debrief the encounter

Look at what could be done differently next time and at what you learned. Could you have checked the weather better or worn warmer clothes?

Jim tells Linda it is challenging for him to address her needs when she says things like “you are slow and incompetent.” He requests that she focus on what she wants instead of laying blame. She acknowledges that the computer breakdown made her feel stressed about

getting her work done. She admitted it was unfair of her to dump her bad mood on him. He admitted that next time, they will make a more thorough assessment.

7. Be grateful for the learning

One of the best ways to prevent repeated conflicts is to acknowledge and appreciate the learning. This way, you anchor into your brain a new way of operating in challenging situations.

Jim thanks Linda for taking responsibility for her part in the communication breakdown and thanks the situation for his new learning about repair assessments. This inspires Linda to thank him for not taking her accusations personally and for dealing with the situation in a constructive way.

7.5 Change your attitude toward storms

Approach 7.5 is an attitude that makes the first 7 steps go much smoother. Many people try to avoid storms or fight them, yet a tree that doesn't sway with the wind and stays stiff will more likely be broken by the storm. Part of life, storms can bring great benefits if you let them. They help trees let go of old leaves and branches.

They nourish and cleanse the earth with water. Thunder and lightening can bring excitement.

A stormy day often invites you to go inside and reflect and renew, rather than be active. If you are caught in a storm, it can challenge you to be strong, to be resourceful, and to grow. Similarly a stormy mood in yourself or another can initiate self-reflection, building of character, letting go of the old, and bringing in something new—and often better.

And finally, a stormy day can help you more deeply appreciate days that are sunny and warm. ▲

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