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A 3-STEP SOLUTION FOR  
GETTING DIFFICULT PEOPLE  
TO CHANGE

LUCY GILL

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**Lucy Gill : How To Work With Just About Anyone: A 3-Step Solution For Getting Difficult People To Change** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How To Work With Just About Anyone: A 3-Step Solution For Getting Difficult People To Change:

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**THREE SIMPLE STEPS FOR TRANSFORMING YOUR WORKPLACE** Every office has them: the ever-complaining colleague...the co-worker who is constantly late for meetings...the boss who either blows up at you or blows you off...or the one person who drives everyone else totally crazy. The problem is, the conventional methods -- like repeated warnings, threats, and heartfelt discussions -- for dealing with this negative behavior often don't seem to work. Drawing on a wealth of professional experience as well as forty years of research, Lucy Gill exposes the futility of these common practices and replaces them with a three-step strategy for creating a productive, conflict-free workplace: 1. Get to the heart of the matter by focusing on what the real problem is. 2. Determine what problem-solving methods to avoid so that you don't perpetuate the conflict. 3. Choose a different and even surprising approach that will solve the problem and keep it solved. Whether you're just starting out in your career or you already have an office along the executive corridor, *How to Work with Just About Anyone* provides the key to success, satisfaction, and sanity in the workplace.

Roland Chazal industrial vice-president, Perrier Vittel, France With humor and subtlety, Lucy Gill offers a practical method for addressing difficult problems and for successfully getting people to change, and gives you the tools and the confidence to find solutions. Using her methods, we effectively and efficiently resolved very tough conflicts in our company. About the Author Lucy Gill is an internationally known authority on the prevention and management of difficult and nonproductive behavior, and is a Research Affiliate at the Mental Research Institute of Palo Alto -- the only management consultant to be accorded that status. Her clients include Bank of America, Varian, Rockwell International, TRW, Sun Microsystems, and a number of Silicon Valley start-up companies. She lives in Coulterville, California. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter One The Care and Feeding of Problems: How Difficult Behavior Gets Reinforced What do you do about impossible people? You know the kind: The manager who hands you a rush project and insists that you drop everything to get it done. Then the completed report sits on her desk for a month -- just the way it did the last time. The ambitious colleague who frequently criticizes your work in front of the boss. The otherwise good assistant who is chronically late. She always apologizes, but the excuses are as annoying as her tardiness. It's the chronic offenders like these who drive you crazy, not the people who occasionally irritate. You can cope with your manager's bad day from time to time. It's when she's having a bad life and taking it out on you that the frustration sets in. When people continue to annoy you no matter what you say or do, that's when you begin to believe that they will never change or that you will never cope -- that the troubled relationship (or your job) is doomed. Not only can you get these people to change their habits, but you can do it with surprisingly little effort and without confrontation. Sound impossible? It's not -- once you know the right approach. You're about to learn the method that will take the trial and error out of changing anyone's troublesome behavior. The (Not) Impossible Dream This method is a result of four decades of research at the Mental Research Institute (MRI) in Palo Alto, primarily the work of the Brief Therapy Center project. In the beginning the founders of MRI studied all types of communication. Then, while analyzing how people handle problems, they discovered that people often get stuck in problems because they pick -- and then inadvertently repeat -- a solution that doesn't work. Their solution was, in fact, prolonging the problem. The researchers figured that the problem would disappear if they: 1) focused on these ineffective solutions rather than on the original problem; and 2) convinced their clients to try something significantly different. So they put aside the traditional diagnostic labels and techniques of psychotherapy and set out to test this hypothesis. Calling their work "brief therapy," the researchers challenged themselves to resolve clients' problems in a maximum of ten one-hour sessions. Over the years they developed and fine-tuned a unique formula that is extraordinarily successful in resolving impossible problems quickly. Dr. Richard Fisch, John Weakland, and Paul Watzlawick, the senior team members, were curious to see whether their method would be as effective with business problems as it was with the problems of families and individuals. In 1984 I was invited to join the Brief Therapy Center's research team. At that time I had worked for twelve years as a management consultant in a variety of organizations, primarily helping teams function effectively and coaching managers on how to handle difficult and nonproductive behavior. We began to collaborate on business problems, blending the center's techniques with my consulting tools. For instance, if a protracted conflict in an organization was the result of a "systems" problem -- like inadequate definitions of people's goals or roles, ineffective communications channels, inappropriate decision styles, or work-flow bottlenecks -- then traditional consulting practices sufficed. Remove the cause of friction and the friction ceases. At other times, good management practices were already in place but the conflict persisted, perhaps due to individuals finding each other's habits intolerable. Then the center's three-step model was the better tool. When the cause of the trouble was a combination of these forces, then we used a blend of the methods. In the course of working on a number of problem situations, we discovered that the center's method worked as well with business problems as it had with individual and family difficulties. In fact, the process saved my clients a great deal of time, trouble, and expense. This book will show you how to use adeptly the three-step process that resolves repetitive problems. You will learn how to: cut your problem down to size (you'll find that you have less work to do than you thought); figure out what inadvertently perpetuates your problem (you'll discover how much control you already have); and, based on that, select a new approach that will get you the change you want. These three steps may appear simple, and they are -- as

simple as programming your VCR. It's simple, that is, when you've read the directions. And when you've mastered these three steps, you'll know how to quickly get people to stop driving you crazy. You'll learn some straightforward ways to get people to quit their annoying habits. You'll also learn some unusual solutions because, with repeat offenders, common-sense methods often don't work. For example, it may make good sense to simply ask your abrasive colleague to stop criticizing you in front of your boss. It is a logical approach and worth a try. But if it doesn't work, there is no point in trying it over and over. As you will learn, a significantly different approach will now be needed if you want your peer to change. Imagine telling him that you find his criticism useful and would like him to do it even more, especially in front of your boss. Sounds crazy, but a client of mine did exactly that and quickly got her peer to back off. You'll learn how to use such unusual but effective solutions, and many simpler ones as well. If you've tried unsuccessfully to change someone's behavior, you already know what doesn't work. You're about to learn what does.

Here's a preview of the first step in the process: identifying specifically what behavior needs to change. Yes, Virginia, People Really Do Change. When repeatedly faced with a manager's or a spouse's irritating behavior, I have often heard people give up, saying, "What's the use? People can't change." It's how we console ourselves when we can't get someone to change. In effect, we're saying that our efforts didn't fail, but rather that the irritating person is like the tiger that can't change its stripes. While comforting, it doesn't do much to change those aggravating spouses and thoughtless co-workers. The fact is, people change all the time. For instance, many of us change our behavior quickly when the CEO walks into the room. We probably behave differently with our colleagues than with our spouses. And it's not likely that we treat each of our children exactly the same (just ask them). We change our behavior all day long. But, you protest, that's not the same as the tiger changing its stripes; however, as you'll see, it's not usually the stripes that need changing. The problem with saying "people can't change" is that the statement isn't specific. People can't change what, precisely? Let's say that you're frustrated with your hyperactive assistant who is still bouncing off the walls despite your efforts to change him. Before you declare that he can't change, you need to ask yourself: What specifically did you try to change about him? What problem does his hyperactivity create? To succeed at changing him, you have to work on the problem his troublesome behavior creates, not vaguely try to transform his personality. You probably don't really care that he has so much energy; you just wish he'd stop cracking his knuckles, drumming the table, and popping up and down in meetings. In other words, while you can't expect him to become Mr. Mellow, you can get him to stop his constant interruptions in staff meetings. Once you've attacked and fixed the specific problem his hyperactivity creates, you might find the rest of his high energy tolerable. You could even enjoy having him around.

Changing the Changeable. Clarifying the specific problem focuses you on changing the changeable. For example, a friend of mine is a nonstop talker. She can literally go on for hours relating story after escapade after travelogue. She's intelligent and creative and a great storyteller, but I get worn out after hours of listening. I want conversation, not just monologue. One day, after about forty minutes, I interrupted her with a time-out signal and said: "While these stories are entertaining, I really look forward to our conversations -- when we kick ideas and theories back and forth. When do we get to do that?" Her response flabbergasted me. "That's what I've been waiting for," she said. I guess while she waited, she was just filling in the empty space with stories. Obviously my usual method of dealing with her -- politely not interrupting, waiting for her to run down -- hadn't worked. I have since learned to interrupt and say, "OK. I need conversation now," or in a twist on the old phrase, "Enough about you. Let's talk about me." She then finishes her story and we spend the rest of our visit in satisfying conversation. I've noticed that she has begun to ask me about myself at the start of our time together, making sure I get my turn first, so to speak. I now look forward to seeing her. Did she change? You bet. She can and does still talk non-stop, but the problem I had with that is resolved. I get to be heard too, we spend a good deal of time in first-rate conversation, and I've learned how to get her to stop when I've had my fill of monologue. Has she altered her style for others? Only for those who have changed their way of dealing with her. For everyone else, I recommend earplugs. So it's not whether people can change, but whether we can get people to change what we want them to. After all, even an insufferable boss is nice to someone. The question is not whether that person can change; the question is: How can we make sure we are the ones that boss is nice to? To succeed in getting people to change their irritating behavior, it's useful to recognize what drives people to behave as they do. Once you see behavior from this new perspective, a world of options opens up.

The Predictable Element in "Unchangeable" Situations. When you're struggling to get your manager or co-worker or daughter to change, you probably see your own frustration clearly. But what you might not see clearly is what actually is going on between the two of you -- what keeps you from succeeding. It's not easy to step back and observe the show when you're one of the actors. But if you're having trouble getting your manager to change, you can count on two things: 1) your perception of the situation will be quite different from your manager's, and 2) these differing perceptions will complement each other. For instance: TOM: "My manager, Murray, micromanages everything. He'll rewrite even the most trivial memo. It's so frustrating. He's got to have the wording his way. So why bother to put in any effort? Now I just send him my first draft and let him have at it!" MURRAY: "Tom just doesn't care. He would mail out trash if I let him. I've got to check everything, even trivial memos. He has no quality standards. And the more I correct him, the worse he gets." How frustrating for Murray. The more he tries to improve quality, the more he receives junk. And Tom isn't faring much better. Each man is getting more of the very thing he detests. Claudia and Mandy tackled the problem

of quality differently, but arrived at a similar impasse:CLAUDIA: "My team leader, Mandy, can't be pleased. She thinks she has a better way to do everything, so she's always making me redo things. And such a temper! I've begun asking more questions, to make sure I'm going to do something exactly the way she wants it. But when I ask, she barks, 'Not that way! Here, let me do it.' Then she grabs the file out of my hand and I stand there feeling like an idiot. I'm afraid to do anything! The harder I try to do it her way, the more she treats me like a stupid little twit."MANDY: "My new assistant, Claudia, drives me up the wall. She's so hesitant and tentative. Every sentence out of her mouth is a question, like 'Do you think we should do X now?' or 'Where do you want me to keep this file?' I was told she is smart, but you'd never know it. I may as well do everything myself."The more careful and hesitant Claudia gets, the more Mandy yells at her. The more Mandy yells and grabs things away, the more hesitant Claudia becomes. Their interactions are like a well-rehearsed dance: Yell, hesitate -- hesitate, yell, cha-cha-cha.The curious thing in both of these examples is that each person's way of handling the other's annoying behavior ends up encouraging more of that behavior, not less. This is the predictable element in seemingly unchangeable situations: When you can't get someone to change, the way you are going about it is probably making things worse.Once caught up in that dance, your situation may feel hopeless. But it's not. When you learn to recognize the steps of your particular dance, you can then learn how to change them. So before you fire that technician, yell at your friend, or quit your job, let me show you how to take the lead and change the dance. You have all the influence you need. You just have to learn how to use it.You're More Influential Than You ThinkWhen we can't get someone to change, we may say it is because Tom needs to throw his weight around or Mandy is an incurable perfectionist or Claudia lacks initiative. In other words, we say it's because of that person's character or personality. This traditional view presumes that problems reside within individuals, separate and distinct from the person's environment. It presumes that our actions don't influence others' behavior. Once a jerk, always a jerk, so to speak.Of course people do have different personalities and habits -- some annoying. That's not the issue. The issue is that you either reinforce or discourage Tom or Mandy or Claudia's habits by your own reactions. By looking at your own actions as well as theirs, you can learn to respond to their irritating manner in a way that extinguishes it instead of igniting it. It's like watching a chess game.When we watch two people playing chess, there is no question that each person reacts to what the other person does. Player A moves a chess piece, setting the game in motion. Player B then makes a move that takes Player A's piece into account. This move then influences Player A's next move. The game advances in this fashion: The moves of one player influence and, in turn, are influenced by the moves of the other.In a chess game the reciprocal influence is obvious. But when we are trying to get someone to change, we may not think about how our actions influence the other person's behavior. We think about how much their actions annoy us. Thus we take the traditional one-sided perspective. To see how this plays out, let's listen to Andy and Carolyn, who are struggling with Martha, their nitpicking manager. Here are their one-sided views of what's going on:ANDY: "I don't know what's wrong with me. I just can't seem to please Martha no matter what I do. I'm staying late most evenings just to try and get everything perfect, but I always miss something that she picks up on. I'm beginning to think I'll never learn this job."CAROLYN: "Martha is so inept. She gives me a new assignment and then leaves me without a clue about what she really wants or where to find the information I need. But she sure loves to nitpick when I'm done. She is so frustrating to work for!"If this were a chess game, Andy would be watching only his pieces and the moves he's made, and would find it baffling that his pieces kept disappearing off the board. Carolyn, on the other hand, would watch only Martha's pieces, and would ignore how her own moves let Martha win. This would not be a very satisfying game of chess, and this is an equally unsatisfying way to look at a problem.To deal effectively with Martha, Andy and Carolyn must not focus on themselves or on Martha in isolation, but must refocus on what's going on between Martha and Andy and between Martha and Carolyn. It is possible that Martha is not a good manager, or that Andy doesn't know his job, or that Carolyn never asks enough questions about an assignment. However, one player can't arbitrarily decide she's won the chess game and declare checkmate. The other player must make moves that let her win. So to solve their problems with each other, the question is not what's wrong with Andy or with Carolyn or with Martha. The question is: What is each person doing that makes the other person act as he or she does and what do they need to do instead?Seeing Both SidesThe Marthas of the world can make you feel miserable and helpless. It seems farfetched to think you influence them. But, in fact, you do actively influence them -- unfortunately, to continue making you miserable. You're still playing chess. You're just losing the game.In your defense, the person you're wishing to change may be a better player than you are. Let's say that your boss likes to explode when displeased -- a move obviously designed to obliterate the opponent (you). It is not easy to come up with an effective countermove as your heart thumps, your mouth goes dry, and your career passes before your eyes. Your next move will probably revolve around trying to survive this explosion and avoid the next one. Your exploder boss then whispers, "Checkmate!"But even with such a boss, you're still choosing your response. You may not know all the choices available, so you may choose ineffective ones, but you're always choosing. (Later in this book, you'll read about a creative and effective response to such an "exploder.") You have options no matter what's going on. On his radio show the comedian Jack Benny had a routine about a robber. Jack, notoriously stingy, is accosted by this fellow who hollers, "Your money or your life!" Silence follows. The robber finally yells, "Hey, I said your money or your life!" Jack Benny replies, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking! Don't rush me!"Next StepsThroughout this

book you will meet clients of mine from a variety of businesses -- from Fortune 500 organizations to small family concerns, from high-tech aerospace companies to manufacturing firms. (Their names and companies have been disguised to protect the innocent -- and the guilty.) I know that many of their struggles will be familiar to you since I've heard these problems described frequently in my twenty-seven years of consulting. You will also read about people's struggles with their spouses, children, and friends. Even if you haven't endured a particular problem, its resolution may still give you ideas for the problem you do face. I suggest that, as you read, you keep in mind a particular person who bothers you. You will learn faster by applying this process as you go along. To make this book both easy to read and to use as a reference, I have divided it into three sections. Section I of the book builds the foundation for successfully getting people to change. You will learn how to see people's difficult behavior in a new light and how to bring into clear focus what you need them to change. These chapters will show you how to save considerable time and effort. Section II describes the five commonsensical ways people try to get others to change -- methods that rarely work but that everybody tries. You'll learn how to avoid these traps and what to do instead. Section III walks you through the steps of applying all you've learned -- ten ways to pick a successful strategy for your particular problem, how to troubleshoot your plan, and how to learn this process quickly. Periodically, you will find application exercises separated from the text by lines, as this paragraph is. You may want to pause and work on your current problem. For those of you who prefer to read the entire book before tackling your problem, I suggest skimming the application exercises for ideas rather than skipping them entirely. Copyright copy; 1999 by Lucy Gill