Members of dental team do not always have a say in the choice of their team colleagues. They must trust that when recruiting new colleagues their managers will select someone who is compatible with the existing team. Even if they select with the team culture in mind, it is part of the nature of interpersonal relationships that from time to time you will reach a point where although you know that you should ‘talk’ with a colleague, you prefer to avoid a potentially difficult conversation for fear of it turning out badly and making matters worse.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a psychological approach often used to reinforce workplace relationships. This approach places great importance upon accentuating the positive, so rather than worrying that things will become confrontational, it advocates that you go into the conversation expecting things will go well.

Even when viewing the situation using a positive frame of mind, the biggest obstacle could well be deciding on how to open the conversation. One possible way to proceed would be to open with “I’d like to get your point of view about…” To make this work, mentally rehearse the conversation through many possible variations and responses, and consider what you would do to bring it back on track if need be.

Before you can build strong and durable workplace relationships with colleagues with whom you do not instinctively see eye-to-eye, you need to understand how the other person’s views and responses differ from yours, then using this information try to get a sense of their ‘difficult behaviour’.

On the whole, we are naturally drawn towards people who are like us and share our outlook and interactive style. However, a truly effective and efficient team is one that accepts people of all styles and recognises that each individual has a valid contribution to make.

Look at the styles below and consider: 1. Which is your natural interactive style? 2. What are your colleague’s styles? 3. What is the style of your ‘difficult person’?

Style 1- Checkers, these:
• Consider and analyse facts and data
• Pay attention to detail
• Reflect before taking action
• Are patient and systematic
• Like to be systematic
• Tend to be perfectionists
• Withdraw under pressure

Style 2- Commanders, these:
• Initiate action
• Act before analysing
• Multi-task
• Are results focused
• Are deadline driven
• Get it done rather than get it right
• Want to control others
• Style 5 Collaborators, these:
• Are sociable
• Put priority on relationships
• Are patient
• Are low risk
• Want to take time to get people’s opinions
• Lose sight of achieving the task in their preoccupation with people’s feelings
• Style 4 - Communicators, these:
• See the big picture
• Enjoy relationships and recognition
• Seek opinions and ideas
• Are impatient
• Are keen to get it done

Understanding how your natural style directs your responses is starting point for allowing others a right to their responses. The basis of good working relationships is one of respect, tolerance and understanding on the part of all parties concerned. This type of relationship can only be forged through acceptance of how others perceive you, and how they react to your personality and style.

Difficult conversations
Glenys Bridges gives advice on how to overcome obstacles

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