

Frenemy or foe

Making friends with difficult colleagues can be a clever career move. Why not become “frenemies” – that’s an enemy turned friend? It’s a relationship you’ll both benefit from.

Human resources consultant Paula Renwick of POD Consulting breaks down difficult people into a number of categories.

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Although each type of person is different, making work friends with each requires many of the same steps. You’re going to need to work with this person so it’s worth investing effort into the process. “It is natural when faced with a situation we are uncomfortable with to either not want to deal with it or tackle it with force.”

Take a deep breath and arrange to go for coffee with your frenemy-to-be. Visualise your success, says Renwick. Imagine yourself succeeding at the conversation, saying the things you want and need to say, and producing a great outcome with any of these types:

1. **The Shark.** This colleague attacks. He or she has an “I win”, “you lose” attitude to relationships. The first thing to do to improve relations with any colleague is to identify the buttons that are being pressed? Can you be highly emotional? Are you making assumptions? Is something in your personal history causing you to over-react?
2. **The Seagull.** These people fly in, cause trouble, and fly away usually leaving a trail of destruction. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes. What is the person thinking? Is he or she aware that there is a problem?
3. **The Two Headed Snake.** This one says Renwick has one thing to say to your face and another behind your back. You can only repair a relationship when you understand the other person’s intentions. What is the impact your soon to be frenemy is having on you? It may not be their intention.
4. **The Screamer.** These people are often bullies and can quite literally yell at you

no matter who is around. Ask yourself if you could find a common purpose with your frenemy?

5. **The Gate Keeper.** It's common for gate keepers to put blocks in the way of others to keep the status quo. Admit your contribution to the problem whatever the type of person you're dealing with. Be honest. What might you have done or not done that contributed?
6. **The Constant Critic.** No matter what you do you are never good enough. When dealing with difficult people be clear about your purpose, says Renwick. Know what you want to say, what you hope to accomplish and what the ideal outcome would be.

When it comes to sitting down for that coffee be positive. Make sure you are prepared. "Are you really listening or are you just waiting for your turn to talk," says Renwick. Tell your frenemy that you'd like to have a better working relationship. Renwick tries to use "I" statements, talking about herself, not the other person. If appropriate you can use humour. But concentrate on the problem solving.

"Use assertive language, Take responsibility for your own emotions, referring to facts and events and not putting down other people," says Renwick. For example say: "I think", "I believe", "I saw", "I feel". Describe facts, events, observed behaviour, concrete things.

Finally, if you really want to make this work it's worth reading a book or two on the subject. Type "difficult people" into your library or bookshop search engine and "Bingo" you're bound to find something suitable.