GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH EMOTIONAL INDIVIDUALS

1. Pay attention to what the person is saying, and particularly what he or she seems to be feeling. Notice non-verbal cues—tone of voice, facial expression, body posture, etc.

2. Listen closely to the person and his or her concerns. Show that you are listening and are genuinely interested. You can be interested and empathic, regardless of whether you agree with what the person is saying.

3. If the person is angry or tearful, don’t run away from or avoid the emotion. Rather than run away from or ignore the feelings, let the person know that you know he or she is upset. Give him or her the feeling that you acknowledge and respect his or her feelings. Most of us really care more that we are acknowledged and that our feelings matter to someone, than we do about getting our own way.

4. Don’t try to calm the other person down just to make you feel more comfortable. Remember, he or she has some good reason for being upset. Instead of saying, “Now, now; I’m sure there’s some good explanation,” you might try, “Boy, that really is a problem. I don’t know what we can do about it, but we can try to figure it out.” Then get the facts; be sure to get the whole story.

5. Don’t get defensive. Problems or mix-ups are not necessarily our fault, and are sometimes inevitable in large systems. Acknowledge the problem and work with the person to help them make the system work for them. If at all possible, don’t “pass the buck.”

6. Use your active listening skills. One of the first things to do is to get all the information you need to figure out the situation. Ask questions; get clarification about things that seem confusing. Don’t be afraid to structure the situation more or explain your role.

7. Work to keep things focused on the problem at hand. By demonstrating good problem-solving attitudes and skills, you will be able to win the person’s respect and trust, and then will be more likely to be able to help them.

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