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The no a**hole rule: Problems caused by the most difficult people at work

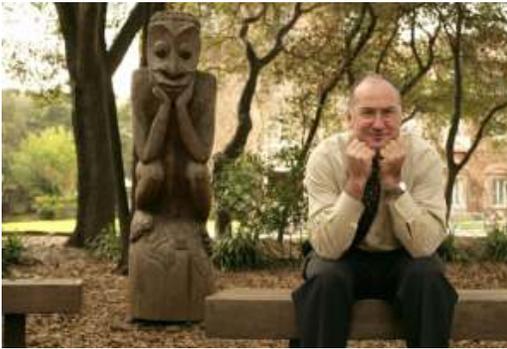


Photo courtesy of Robert Sutton.

[Stanford University](#) professor [Robert Sutton](#) became interested in difficult people in the [workplace](#) as a [child](#), when his [father](#) gave him this piece of advice: "Life's too short to work with a**holes."

Not only is life too short to deal with the most difficult people at work, Sutton—the author of *The No A**hole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't*—says that organizations simply can't afford to employ these types of people. This is particularly true of bad [bosses](#), as studies show that 20 million Americans are actually [driven from their jobs](#) as the result of an abusive direct supervisor. And the [cost](#) of high employee turnover is not the only way that these abusers can affect a company's bottom line.

"Some surveys show that when people work for an abusive, a**hole boss, they tend to not put in as much effort, they tend to not make as many suggestions, and they actually tend to [steal](#) more," said Sutton.

But difficult people in the workplace do not stop affecting you when you leave the office, as their toxicity can have detrimental consequences on your [health](#).

"If you have a boss that is basically a lousy boss—somebody who is both emotionally insensitive and incompetent—you have about twice the chance of having a [heart](#) attack," Sutton added.

Workplace a**holes: Dealing with the most difficult people in the office

Dealing with difficult people in the workplace can make each day a misery that definitely loves company. Although getting through those long hours in the office with obnoxious people around can be challenging, Sutton says there are ways to alleviate the [grief](#) they cause you.

Detach from the situation. By doing this, you are not letting the office a**holes live in your head rent free and you can get some peace of mind.

Change your views. If you reframe the way you see things, it can go a long way toward feeling better while you're at work. You can change your way of thinking by not blaming yourself for what's going on around you and remembering that these problems are only temporary.

Reduce your exposure to difficult coworkers. Limiting how much interaction you have with difficult coworkers and bad bosses can help restore your sanity. Try to hide behind [technology](#) as much as you can by avoiding [face-to-face](#) interactions with workplace a**holes in favor of telephone meetings and [e-mail](#) conversations.

Document bad behavior. If a coworker, or even your boss, is making your life miserable, Sutton suggests that you document all incidents and present them to the difficult person's supervisor. If you take this route, however, remember that there is strength in numbers.

"Trying to fight the system by yourself is usually not very effective," said Sutton. "You're more likely to change things if you can get a group of people to also document the behavior, so that you can fight back together."

Are you a difficult coworker? You might be an a**hole if...

Sutton says that if you think that there are the difficult coworkers in one corner and the good coworkers in another, think again. We have all, at one time or another, acted like an a**hole at work.

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Posted by Kenya McCullum at [December 21, 2010](#)

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