

## Dialing Down Tense Work Dialogues



*By Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC*

Years ago when I was vice-president of a management consulting and training firm in Falls Church, Virginia, it became apparent that one coworker in particular flat out didn't like me. It didn't matter what I did or said, or whether I tried to avoid or befriend this person. Maybe I looked too much like someone from the past.

Following several weeks of experiencing subtle hostility, I decided to assert myself. Rather than confront this person directly, I determined that the best strategy would be to write a note. I wrote this note:

*Greetings. I acknowledge your personal dislike for me. We are both professionals and I believe we can put aside our differences for the good of the firm.*

*Yours truly,  
Jeff Davidson*

Somehow, something must have worked, even though I was never told anything. Thereafter, I was able to have semi-pleasant exchanges with this person in the

Situations don't always work out this easily. Writing that note could have further fanned the flames. I felt I had to do something, however. By acknowledging that I knew I wasn't liked, and then drawing upon the fact that we were both dedicated, hard working, talented professionals, I "bonded us" in a novel way under less than ideal circumstances.

Basically, I learned that appealing to a hostile party by drawing upon something you have in common or reminding the other party of his humanity, offered a decent chance of forging an effective connection.

Years before caller I.D. capability, I received several crank calls from someone responding to an advertisement I had placed in the newspaper. On the third call, I tried something bold. I said to the caller, "So this is how you spend your days? Does your mother know you're engaged in this type of behavior?" The caller promptly hung up and never called back.

Now I was rolling and eager to apply this developing insight. I did so the next time I encountered resistance from a vocal detractor in a training session. I said, “I guess we all have occasions where the information we have to offer doesn’t immediately square up with the perspectives of listeners, but there must be a way to leap this hurdle. What would you suggest?”

His demeanor visibly changed, and he replied, “Let’s continue, and I’ll give you my suggestion at the break.” This was fine with me, I felt relieved. It was much easier to work through the issue one on one than in front of the group!

So if things are not going well with someone in your workplace or in your immediate environment, don’t give up. You might be only seconds always from making a personal appeal that works.

**Jeff Davidson** is “The Work-Life Balance Expert®” and the leading personal brand in speaking, writing, and reflecting on work-life balance issues. He’s spoken to Fortune 50 companies such as IBM, Cardinal Health Group, and Lockheed; and to American Express and Westinghouse. He wrote *Simpler Living*, *Breathing Space*, and *Dial it Down—Live It Up*, among 62 other books. Visit [www.BreathingSpace.com](http://www.BreathingSpace.com)