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# **How to Handle Problem People - Life Lessons from a Balky Bovine**

Dan Ohler  
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Do you have people in your life that p... (make you angry)?

You know the ones I'm talking about. It may be your child, partner, colleague, or boss. You think that you have established some boundaries, or the rules seem like common sense, and yet that person seems to find ways to get under your skin – just because they can.

What's the deal? Is it something wrong with them, or is it about you?

Maybe it's a little of both. I learned a lesson about this from the bovine species, a heifer we called Harriet Houdini. Each year, we buy some year-old cattle to harvest the grass on our small farm. We have friends who buy these animals to fill their freezers with natural grass-fed beef.

Last year, one of the heifers (young female) had the name "Harriet" on the identification tag in her ear. The Houdini descriptor was soon added rather than the other choice words I had for her.

Harriet Houdini was docile but she had a habit of going wherever she liked. If the group of heifers were in one field, Harriet would be in another. I did not see her jump a fence and she never broke one. She either had pogo-stick legs or she figured out how to teleport herself from one side to the other, regardless of the height of the fence.

It was a game for her. She would peer at me through the office window, and clean it with her tongue if I didn't notice her. She would wander into the garden and eat the peas, lettuce, and corn. If I put her in the corral, she would soon be on the outside, looking at me as if to say, "Ha, ha, ha. Catch me if you can."

Initially, I got angry. I would get behind her and yell, set my dog after her to chase her, and madly wave sticks at her. I got myself all worked up.

Did my antics help? They got me all stewed up, hot, and bothered. They likely took some valuable minutes off of my lifespan, because physiologically that's what happens when we spend time being angry.

Lessons Learned

It seemed that Harriet just wanted my attention.

- I learned to laugh at the situation rather than fume. After all, she was not putting herself or anyone else in danger.
- I learned to talk gently to Harriet. I would call her, and she would follow me quietly through the gate to where she belonged.
- Each day I would talk to her, scratch her, and sometimes offer her a treat from the garden. With the positive attention, she seemed satisfied, and would stay with the rest of the herd.

How does this relate to you?

As a human, you are slightly more advanced than a cow. And yet, at the core, you have similar needs to Harriet Houdini's. You need to feel loved and cared for. You need attention and respect from others.

When you see undesirable behaviours in others, it may be their unconscious call for your love and attention. If you exhibit anger, yell, scream, cry, punish, or make them feel guilty, you are giving them the attention they need. It may not be positive, but it is attention. To their unconscious mind, any attention is better than no attention.

New Response

Think about those people that get under your skin. They need your love, approval, and attention.

- Consciously look for things that they do well (positive behaviours) rather than looking for things that tick you off. This may be a challenge until you are able to change your attitude toward them.
- Acknowledge and reward them for those positive behaviours. Be specific about the behaviour you noticed.
- Communicate effectively. Speak kindly and respectfully to them. Listen to them when they speak. Listen means keep your mouth closed – to understand their thoughts and feelings. Listen does not mean to prepare to fire back with your defenses, justifications, or solutions.
- Show them, through your behaviours, that you care about them as a human being.
- Be genuine. Your acknowledgement and reward must come from your heart – it is a gift, without any expectation of receiving something in return.

Yoda from Star Wars said, "Try? There is no try. There is only do or not do."

I challenge you to commit long-term to "doing" the suggestions above. In your work and business life, you will experience less stress and greater success. In your personal life, you will experience greater happiness, joy, and personal satisfaction.

Over time, by using this new response, you will notice more of the positive behaviours, and fewer of those "Harriet

Houdini antics."

You can't control others and what they do, but you can always choose your attitude and behaviour.

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