

## Ep #67: 3 Ways to Deal with Challenging Co-workers



### **Full Episode Transcript**

With Your Host

**Heather Branscombe**

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Hey everyone, this is Angela, one of the producers of *Clinicians Creating Impact*. Heather asked that we re-share the following episode with you this week as a reminder to all of us who are struggling with a challenging co-worker that there is another way. You will discover three ways to empower yourself when navigating tricky working relationships and hopefully a new way to look at why you're feeling the way you feel in those situations.

If you've already listened to this episode, I suggest that you stay tuned in and see if you hear something you may have missed the first or fifth time you listened. Ready? Let's hear what Heather has to say when working with a co-worker is hard.

Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hello, friend. I'm really starting to get into the groove of this podcast thing and it is becoming one of my most favorite parts of the week. Now, this may be the honeymoon stage of podcasting, and I'm very well aware that it very well could be. And I'm also really excited to see where I can take this and to be able to connect with you more in the future.

I'd also really like to start to get some of you in on this podcast as well. If I haven't reached out to you yet, please don't be offended. If you would like to come on this podcast and discuss all things clinical work, I would love to connect with you. The best way to connect with me if you don't already have my email is probably to follow me on Instagram. And my Instagram account is

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@HeatherBranscomb, all one word, .coaching and to send me a DM as the kids say.

I'm really excited to talk about working with your co-workers today. So often as clinicians we work in teams. And even if we don't work in teams itself, the nature of our work means that we work with other people. And because we're service professionals, it means that we like it when others feel happy and feel better.

Because we work with other people, when people don't do what we want them to do, especially co-workers, that can feel really hard. It can make our work feel harder or the things that we want to accomplish at work feel harder, and it can make it feel harder to work with the other person. So, as an example, say you're doing a joint assessment with another clinician and you're doing a report together. And the other clinician is taking a lot longer than you would hope and you're worried about if you're going to make the report deadline that you agreed upon.

One, that person taking longer can make it feel like it's harder for you to get your parts done. And secondly, we often don't like to disappoint our client or patient or whoever needs the report. So you can really be worried about your client and the client experience as well as your own experience.

I think we intuitively know, or maybe we've just learned this through experience, that we actually can't control others behavior. I think you probably know that. I know that I know that too. And yet, when people are not behaving the way that we want them to behave or expect them to behave, knowing that we actually can't control their behavior can create feelings of being something like a victim in the situation.

I've actually been talking about this as well in our own workplace where I work at Abilities. And I want to first qualify by saying I work with amazing people. This is not my way of calling anybody out. It's a thought that I work with amazing people, and I love that thought. I truly believe I work with amazing people. And these amazing people that I work with have a variety of strengths as well as opportunities to grow, including myself.

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I also have strengths and growth opportunities as a leader and one of the things that I've noticed recently is that we don't have a clear outline in our organization of who to talk to if you have a challenge and you can't solve that on your own. Now, some of that is just because we've acquired some growth, and so while it would have made it easier before to know who to talk to, now there are more people in the mix.

And so hopefully by the time you hear this podcast we have corrected that. Actually I know by the time you hear this podcast, we've corrected that. But I just want to offer that as an option to say I'm right here with you as somebody that struggles and has struggled with this issue in the past.

We have a great handbook at Abilities that tells you who to ask questions to if you have questions about a certain topic, but we really didn't give any clear guidelines. And I didn't give any clear guidelines on what I expected on who to talk to, when to see your supervisor, which supervisor to talk to you, and the work that I expected to be done before somebody would actually come to a supervisor. So those are some of the things that I'm looking to fix at my work.

All of this to say, I've really been thinking a lot about that. And I want to take some of the work that I've done personally as a leader, as well as talking to other experts, and bring that all to you so that you can learn from my mistakes.

Today I'm going to give you three tips to decide how you can find your own empowerment in any situation when working with a co-worker feels hard. Now, I know it's easy when somebody isn't doing what we expect them to do, to really focus on that person and what we might perceive as their lack of accountability to a certain expectation.

Now, it's an easy place for your brain to go. I want to offer you that the most helpful place for you to go first, ironically, is to turn your attention and to check in on yourself. The first tip I have to decide on how you want to find your own empowerment in a situation where a co-worker is not doing what you're expecting them to do is to figure out what you are feeling about it and why. Understanding what you're feeling and why you're feeling it can be really helpful for you to then understand where you want to move to next.

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Next, you want to ask yourself, what is my responsibility in this situation? The reason that you want to ask yourself some version of this question is that it's inherently understood in a workplace that there are different expectations given to yourself as an employer or by an employer, or that you jointly share if that co-worker is your employer.

Still, there's a set of expectations in any given working environment that typically outlines what your responsibility is in any given situation.

Now, if you don't actually have a clear understanding of what your responsibility is in that situation, then that's an important piece to figure out and it's going to be part of the reason why it feels hard when things aren't clear on how to proceed. And it's going to make it harder than what it actually needs to be.

When you become more clear on what you're feeling, why you're feeling it and what your actual responsibility is in that situation, all of those things can be really helpful to dial down that more primitive part of the brain. That's that part of the brain that is very efficient, meaning that it's very efficient in making meaning in a situation, but it isn't always very effective in terms of helping you to get to the goal that you actually want.

By understanding where your primitive brain is coming from, that really does allow more compassion to that brain that allows that part of the brain to feel a little bit more heard. And ultimately, when you provide compassion to that primitive part of your brain, and ultimately to all of you, it really, ironically, does tend to dial down that part of that brain a little bit.

The last tip I want to give you when you're ready to answer the question is what feels compassionate for both you and the other people in the situation? So, again, you're not necessarily going to go do that when you're feeling your most frustrated or angry. You want to allow yourself to have those feelings and to process through them. But when you feel ready to start and to problem solve from that higher part of your brain, from that better place, you want to start thinking about what feels compassionate to both yourself and the other people in the situation.

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So many of us identify, especially if you identify as people pleasers, we often think about what is more important and compassionate to the other people in the situation. So, for example, in this example where I am writing a joint report with someone else, I might be thinking about what's compassionate for the client, and what might be compassionate for the other clinician. But I might not be thinking about what's compassionate for myself.

So, again, if I ask myself with compassion to myself and all the other people involved in this situation, I can ask myself something like, it could be possible that I can't finish my part without the other clinician finishing their part if we actually have a joint report. And I don't want to disappoint the client by having the report be submitted later than what we told them that it would.

When I take a couple of moments to actually draw that out and understand my primitive brain a little bit better, well then, of course, it makes sense that I feel anxious about that. And it helps me to see where my responsibility begins and ends.

So in this hypothetical example, I think of my responsibility in the situation, it really is to write my part of the report and to communicate that with the team. So first, I'm thinking about what feels compassionate for myself and the other people in the situation. I can talk to the other clinician and tell them about them not meeting the expectations that we'd agreed upon, if we had actually agreed upon when they were going to do it, how it's impacting me and my work.

This isn't me being their police officer. I'm not policing their work, I'm really just telling them the impact that their work has on my work. I notice that when I do that, I'm not even asking them to change. I mean, if they're already late, we can't change what's already happened. We can't change it from being late now if it is late, but I hope by communicating that in an empathetic and compassionate way for both myself and the other person, they might be able to make a more empowered choice on their end on how they spend their time in the future. And they may choose not to impact me in that similar way in the future.

Second, if I'm thinking about what is being compassionate for all sides, something that I could do is I could communicate with the client and let them

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know that the report will be late. I can decide if I want to divulge why the report is being late, and sometimes that's appropriate and sometimes I might feel that that's not appropriate. Sometimes it's not even necessary. But notice that I get to decide what feels good and compassionate moving forward and I can communicate that. That's my part of my responsibility as being part of the team.

Third, I can decide if I want to talk to a supervisor based on my own organizational expectations of what to report, when to report my own thoughts, and why. If this is a one off thing and it's a very unusual behavior for this other clinician to be late, I might decide not to report it to anybody else. And I may feel really good about that. But if this is something that I'm noticing that's happening going on going forward, I may decide to talk to my own supervisor about it, or their supervisor, depending, again, on what the expectations are in my own organization.

So next time you're working with a co-worker and it feels hard, try these three tips. One, figure out what you're actually feeling and why. Number two, figure out what is your responsibility in this situation. And three, ask yourself what is the most compassionate thing that you could do for both yourself and the other people in this situation?

I can't wait to see the impact that you create using this newfound knowledge today. See you soon.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Clinicians Creating Impact*.

It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I'd really want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value. To learn more about me and the work that I do, visit my website at [www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner](http://www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner) to download your free Getting it All Done at Work process and to see what I'm up to. Thanks so much.

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Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to [abilitiesrehabilitation.com](http://abilitiesrehabilitation.com). See you next week.