Dealing with Difficult Behavior (Part I)
By Norb Slowikowski

There are times when foremen will have to deal with a general contractor’s superintendent who may be difficult to deal with. If our objective is to build win/win relationships with people and provide total customer satisfaction, then the foreman must learn how to communicate with different types of difficult behaviors. There are eight basic types of difficult behavior a foreman might encounter. Effective communication skills need to be implemented to diffuse difficult behavior. This month we’ll look at four of the behavior types and ways the foreman can deal with them. Next month we’ll discuss the other types.

What The Pessimist might say: “You know there’s no way you’re going to finish on time. Just look at the crew you’ve got. This isn’t a quality job. I knew this was going to happen.”

What the foreman should do: Avoid getting drawn in. Don’t argue. Consider what he is saying, and use it constructively.

What the foreman should say: “You’re really concerned about meeting the schedule. I suppose you are right if we don’t take appropriate action to get back on track. But I assure you that I will carry out my end, and we’ll be back on track by Friday.”

What The Know-It-All might say: “I really think you need more guys on the job. I know this job inside and out, and you’re not doing what it takes to make the schedule. Maybe I should take over for you and make sure this thing is done right.”

What the foreman should do: Be prepared. Listen and acknowledge. Question firmly, don’t confront. Suggest alternatives.

What the foreman should say: “I really think you need more guys on the job. I know this job inside and out, and you’re not doing what it takes to make the schedule. Maybe I should take over for you and make sure this thing is done right.”

What The Attacker might say: “This entire job is a mess. You idiots are never gonna make the schedule. What kind of *&$% job is this? I’m gonna go over your head because obviously you don’t know what the @!%$& you’re doing!”

What the foreman should do: Stand up for yourself. Challenge him. Give him time to cool down. Look directly at him and wait. Interrupt with his name if necessary. Get him to sit down. Speak from your point of view. Be ready to be friendly.

What the foreman should say: “We been around a long time and, just like you, I take pride in what I do. I too am concerned about meeting the schedule and producing quality results. So if you would just calm down, I think I can solve your problem. I’m here to work with you so that the total job comes in on time. Can we do this together?”

What The Jabber might say: “I was talking to my boss about this job. Your people seem to be working hard, but it doesn’t look like the schedule will be met. How will you make this happen? Do I need to involve people over your head?”

What the foreman should do: Confront the dig, and give him the opportunity to confirm or deny. Seek group confirmation. Deal with the problem The Jabber has inferred.

What the foreman should say: “I heard that you think I’m not interested in the job coming in on schedule. Is that what you said? I want to make sure I understand where you are coming from, so I’ve come to you directly. Just so you know that I care about the entire job, here is my game plan, which will help you get what you want and also explain how my crew will meet the schedule. I’d like you to review it and get back to me with your input.”

About the Author
Norb Slowikowski is president of Slowikowski & Associates, Inc., Darien, Ill.