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## Dealing with Difficult People in an HOA

*by Richard Thompson*

Dealing with difficult people in any setting can be a real challenge. But in volunteer-based homeowner associations, where there is none of the leverage managers have with employees, there is an entirely new level of difficulty. And, believe it or not, a new level of opportunity. The key is common interest.

Where we live means a lot more to us than any other physical environment. Our territoriality buttons are more easily pushed. Our investment is greater. We can easily get defensive of our personal space and quickly lose sight of community issues. It's worth recognizing that, to one degree or another, we all have this in common. What unites us seems to divide us and vice versa. In a homeowner association we are challenged to balance our individual and collective needs.

Most of us believe it's a good thing to work toward achieving that balance, but some people seem oblivious to it. And some people seem downright determined to undermine it. It's easy to imagine that the folks who obstruct or dismantle our meetings have malicious intent, or at least thoughtless disregard. Why are some people so difficult? Because they learned how -- and because they didn't learn how not to. The seriously difficult person is significantly dis-inhibited. He or she didn't learn the typical social inhibitors that make for balanced exchanges. Most of us know how to "make nice," even when we don't much want to. Some people simply don't know how.

We can name some of the more difficult behaviors and we can speculate about what motivates them. In general, fear is the prime motivator. Extremely difficult people are extremely dis-inhibited in their response to fear.

**Terrorist Behavior** literally holds a group hostage. In extreme cases, this includes streams of abusive language, threats or emotional outbursts (yelling, crying, banging). There is frequently a relentless nature to all of this, so it's clear to the group that nothing else stands a chance of going on.

**Aggressive Behavior** is domineering, offensive, in-your-face and is easily triggered. In fact, the threat of aggression hangs over the group and creates an underlying tension. This behavior is more controlled than the first category in that it is less all-over-the-map and probably more directed at individuals than at the entire group.

**Passive-Aggressive Behavior** avoids full-blown confrontation but strikes out covertly. Hidden agendas and character assassination attempt to sabotage normal, above-board group process and interaction.

**Unyielding Behavior** is unable or unwilling to set a past issue aside. The issue or emotion keeps coming up, even when the subject is different and the cast of characters has changed. Everything is referenced to an unresolved past. While this behavior is less invasive and threatening than those above, its continued presence is an energy drain and source of frustration.

**Persecuted Behavior** is the victim response -- blaming, whining and complaining. Although most of us