

Collaborate with difficult people the Crabby way

Applies to: Microsoft Office OneNote 2007, OneNote 2003



Crabby Office Lady

Your workplace draws all sorts of personalities. So how do you collaborate with them and still keep your sanity? Let Office be the middleman.

You know them; they're everywhere. You may be one, be married to one, carpool with one, or have given birth to one: difficult people. And as rational, mature adults, we've all learned to get along with all types of people, right?

Well...maybe not. But there are ways to work together with people you'd rather not be in the same room with, and of course, Office can help out.

NOTE To be honest, though, the tips I'm offering today can work for anyone who is interested in more exotic (and effective) methods of collaborating than, say, using different colored markers on a whiteboard. I just use the "difficult people" example because it's fun and crabby (and expected of me).

SharePoint Server: When you want to share from afar

A SharePoint site is basically a Web site where you and your collaborators can work on one single project or a series of projects. You can post announcements, share links, upload and work on documents, and coordinate schedules. It's pretty unlimited, really; it all depends on what you want to do and how you want to do it.

In our case, we want to squeeze the most work out of our difficult coworkers as possible with the least amount of distress. And while a SharePoint site has scads and scads of features that will allow you to do this, I picked two that work best for me.

Meeting workspaces

A Meeting Workspace is a type of SharePoint Web site that acts as a central spot to house all the information you need for those non-face-to-face meetings you'll be having with Miss Persnickety. There you can publish agendas, documents you plan to discuss, meeting notes, and results, etc. When you send a meeting request to little Miss P., include a hyperlink that goes to the workspace where she can learn about the meeting details and whatnot.

Document workspace

A Document Workspace is another type of SharePoint site, but instead of keeping track of meeting information, it's a virtual (read: imaginary and yet somehow real) place where you and Mr. Negativity (Ms. P's office mate, which might explain things a bit...) can collaborate on presentations, documents, spreadsheets, and drawings.

So instead of having to send versions of the files back and forth through e-mail or even <gasp> meet to discuss it, you've made Negative Man an automatic workspace member. This means that he can work on the files on his local machine, and by using the Shared Workspace task pane, he can make changes to the files, get updates, and even check off that long list of tasks you've assigned to him. (Who's thinking negative now, mister? Huh? Huh?).

Get it? Both of us always have access to the most recent version of the project we're working on. And we're not even breathing the same air.

Now that you have a meeting workspace set up and a document workspace set up too, you're all set to collaborate, plan, schedule, and interact with one another quite effectively and without one of you ever losing your temper, your cool, or your mind. How's that for customer satisfaction?

[Learn more about collaboration in SharePoint Server 2007.](#)

OneNote

If you're not a SharePoint user, or if you want to try something else, consider OneNote, which offers a variety of ways to share notes with others.

You can:

- Send notes in an e-mail message
- Publish notes to a shared location
- Move a section of notes to a shared location
- Start a shared note-taking session

This last one is my favorite. With the Shared Session feature, you can all take part in a peer-to-peer note-taking session, interacting and working with your ideas on shared OneNote pages. As long as everyone is on the same network, you can all work on the same notes whether you're in one room together, holed up in your individual cubicles, or even working from home.

Sounds like magic, doesn't it? Well, in a way it is, and when I first tried it out, I pestered everyone I knew with it. You can basically hold live, one-to-many note-taking or brainstorming sessions, each from the comfort of your own office. I invite you to a session, you join in, and there you have it. You stay on your side of the fence, and I stay on mine. But we share our ideas by writing, typing, or drawing.

Learn more about OneNote [shared notebooks](#) and [note-taking sessions](#).

Live Meeting

LiveMeeting is a Web conferencing technology that lets you hold meetings with large or small groups with people all over the planet. All you need is a phone, a personal computer with an Internet connection, and a browser. It's real-time collaboration without the real-time aggravation!

Some of the benefits of using LiveMeeting:

- Use interactive tools such as the electronic whiteboard to mark up files, create flowcharts, and more. Meeting attendees can see exactly what you are doing — including your mouse movements and keyboard input. You can also share only a portion of your screen to keep your audience focused on the key information.
- Take your audience to live Web pages. Each meeting attendee can click on links, fill out forms, or use interactive media. The preview feature allows you to see the page before you show it to meeting attendees.
- Save your meeting content and enable remote participants to print it. Or record it with the audio and visuals synchronized so that everyone can access the information they need — even after the meeting has ended.
- Travel less. Why walk across the hall when you can pull the shades down, close your door, and get your ideas across without all that hair rending and silent cursing? And if your difficult coworker lives in Italy, all the better.

Of course, I'm going a little over the top here. LiveMeeting *really* starts to pay for itself when you're dealing with people who aren't just down the hall. Can you imagine the money you'll save on airfare, time spent in security lines at the airport, and that hotel mini-bar bill?

[Learn all about Live Meeting.](#)

More ideas...

For example, take a look at Doug Thomas's Office Casual video [Office Casual: How I use Office Live Workspace](#).

There are many more ways to keep a working relationship alive and well while avoiding being cast in others' workplace soap operas. What are some of yours???

Final words about workplace difficulties

Some of you may be completely aghast that I've written an entire column about how to collaborate with coworkers without ever having to see them. *Of course* I don't want you to do this 100% of the time. It's not good to run from the challenges — and challenging people — that you're bound to face in your life.

So, listen: Sometimes it's better to try and work it out with prickly coworkers in a personal manner, but sometimes you need to just do the best you can with the tools you've got. And that was the point of this column: Collaboration does not have to mean being forced into a windowless room with folks who raise our blood pressure and lower our expectations. Do the right thing, will you?

"The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials." — Chinese proverb

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.