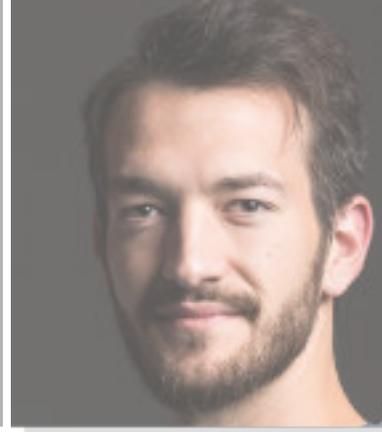


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How to deal with people



Stoic philosophy helps us deal with life's challenges.

As social creatures, we face many of our challenges with other people. Sometimes their talking can be perceived as annoying, their actions as disturbing, and their values as incongruent with ours.

So how can we deal effectively with such a challenging interaction with another human being? After all, we want to express our best even when annoyed. *Especially* when annoyed.

We are born for each other

Stoicism offers countless strategies for dealing with other people. Today, we'll look at six of the ten rules Marcus Aurelius wrote down to himself

We were all born for each other.
- Meditations, 11.18.1-11

Marcus reflects on his relation to other people. He was born to be their leader as an emperor, "as a ram leads his flock and the bull his herd". We're meant to act according to nature, all in the interest of each other.

You yourself have many faults and are no different from them.

Philosophy is here to find our own faults. And we have plenty of them. Marcus adds, that even if we refrain from some wrongs, we probably do it out of fear of public opinion, which is a poor motive.

You are not even sure that they are doing wrong.

Who are we to judge? We don't know the future, we don't know their exact plans.

Generally one needs to know a great deal before one can pronounce with certainty on another's actions.

It is not their actions which trouble us – because these lie in their own directing minds – but our judgments of them.

It is not what happens to you

Classic Stoic wisdom: It's not what happens that harms us, but our judgment of what happens. If we can remove these judgments, Marcus adds, our anger will be gone.

The greater grief comes from the consequent anger and pain, rather than the original causes of our anger and pain.

When we react angrily and smash a glass, this reaction will be cause us greater pain than the very thing that caused the anger-reaction. Whether it's a smashed glass, a mean remark to our colleague, or shouting at our kids, our reaction will often cause us more harm than the original incident.

Choose a different response

Solution? Step back from the initial impression, remember that we're likely to overreact because of our emotions in the heat of the moment, and choose a smarter response.

Kindness is invincible – if it is sincere, not fawning or pretense.

"What can the most aggressive man do to you if you continue to be kind to him", Marcus asks himself. If the opportunity arises, we should re-educate this man, "No, son, we were born for other purposes than this. There is no way that I can be harmed,

but you are harming yourself, son". "Neither bees nor any other social creatures act like this", he'd explain further.

Okay, I'm not sure whether calling an aggressor "son" will ever be a good idea, unless, it *is* your son. Marcus clearly states that the advice should not be ironic or critical. "It should be affectionate, with no hurt feelings, not a lecture or a demonstration to impress others".

Now, these are certainly valuable strategies in present times.

Our biggest challenge

The biggest challenge, however, is awareness in the present moment. It's in these situations when we need it most. Oftentimes, another person's commentary will make our ego feel attacked. And suddenly we're no longer the calm person we imagine ourselves to be, but we're in reactive mode and, if we don't pay attention, will do or say something that adds fuel to the fire. Or actually *starts* the fire.

So, while it can be helpful to have these strategies ready at hand, it's a prerequisite to be present in the here and now. You observe the situation, you observe your emotional reactions, you remain in control and are able to step back from these impressions, and you decide for yourself how you want to respond to the situation.

As a first rule, then, try to be present in the moment and gift your full attention to the other person.

You can find the rest of the rules and a longer conclusion in my article [Marcus Aurelius' 10 Rules for Dealing with People](#).