

## How to deal with stinky coworkers

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak  
COLUMNIST ([www.AdviceChief.com](http://www.AdviceChief.com))

It makes for a long day at work when you have to sit next to someone who wreaks of body odor, foot odor, cigarette smoke, or who emits a strong scent associated with cologne or perfume. No matter how hard you try to ignore it, the smell continually drifts into your nose. Even if the smell or scent doesn't bother some people, you should not have to take in someone else's smell, good or bad. Unless you're okay with rubbing Vick's vapor rub in your nose to mask the smell, you'll have to speak with someone about the matter or your work life may become a very miserable experience for you.

Depending on your personality, you could speak directly to the person about the matter or report it to a supervisor. If you're okay with talking to the person first, just be honest and display a positive attitude in your approach and maybe they won't be offended or take it personal and they actually change their habit out of consideration.

If this doesn't work, you'll need to speak with your or their supervisor about the issue. A good supervisor will bring

the issue to the person's attention without naming the complainant. One time I had to address a similar situation with a subordinate whose perfume bothered nearby coworkers and I basically said to her: "Although your perfume has a nice scent, there are some employees with sensitive noses." I didn't tell her anyone complained and I didn't even tell her to go lighter in application. She ended up switching to a lighter scented perfume on her own and everyone lived happily ever after.

On another occasion, I simply had to tell someone to improve their personal hygiene. Not only did people complain, but I personally noticed it as well when in near proximity of the individual. When I addressed the matter with this person, I was very careful to not come off as insulting. They realized I wasn't trying to embarrass them but rather that I cared about their reputation with fellow employees. As a result, they didn't become defensive and they improved their personal hygiene habits.

On a more extreme case, I dealt with an employee who ignored the issue and refused to improve their personal hygiene. Their continued incidents

were documented and ultimately ended with their dismissal.

If a supervisor takes too long to rectify the situation, don't hesitate to ask to be relocated to a different office space or cubicle until the problem is resolved. If your request is denied, then you have to make a decision on how much you can tolerate. If you can't tolerate it at all, you'll have to elevate the issue to someone higher in the supervisory chain for possible action.

If the situation is never resolved and you don't have any other kind of leverage (systemic or legal support), then you have to make a tough life decision and decide whether to seek employment elsewhere.

People should have enough pride in their dress and appearance to maintain a healthy state of grooming and cleanliness at work, but unfortunately some don't. Either they don't care or they weren't raised to be conscientious enough about how their personal hygiene may affect other people. Your coexistence with these types of people is contingent upon your tolerance level. How much can you take?

~ The End ~