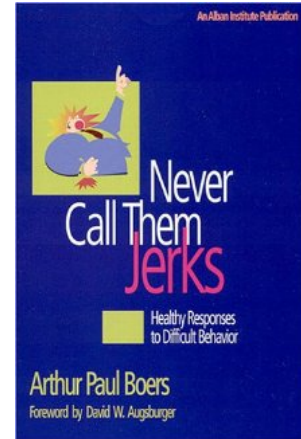


TITLE: Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior
ISBN: [1566992184](#), [9781566992183](#)

AUTHOR: Arthur Paul Boers

AUTHORS' CREDENTIALS:

Education: D. Min. (worship and spirituality) from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, M. Th. (pastoral counseling) from Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, M. Div. from McCormick Theological Seminary, M.A.(peace studies) from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and B.A. from University of Western Ontario.



Vocation: Boers served as a pastor in various settings in the USA and Canada for 16 years. He is now an author and professor of pastoral theology (Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, previously at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana).

FOCUSED ON CHURCH?

Yes, with a particular attention to the roles and responsibilities of the pastoral staff

BIBLICAL VIEWPOINT?

Yes. However, it may be more accurate to say that Boers uses Biblical references. He clearly builds on a foundation of personal experience and extensive study in conflict management (both secular and church sources). Boers works within family systems theory rather than any well laid out theological framework.

STRENGTHS:

- If you only have time for one book on conflict, *Never Call Them Jerks* is a good one (especially chapter 1). If you are going to read several, this book will help you assess the others.
- Chapter 1 is an excellent starting point. Boers cautions against the labeling and name-calling found in many other books. In fact, it is hard to read some of them after Boers points out the hazards of “diagnosing” and labeling difficult people (see page 68 and following).
- The author has a quick overview of Speed Lea’s levels of conflict. It’s better to digest Lea’s work directly, but a quick introduction/refresher helps.
- Boers also has a quick overview of some of Hugh Halverstadt’s work, particularly the healthy guidelines for conflict (starting at page 71).
- There is a list of how-to ideas on giving appropriate criticism (page 117).

HOLES AND SOFT SPOTS:

- For his foundation in family systems, the author points to Rom. 12: 4-6 (we are one body in Christ, with many interrelated members) and 1 Cor. 12:21 (Paul’s imagery of interdependent parts of the body). The Biblical references are more window dressing than they are undergirding. It is a short book, densely packed with helpful information, so the lack of a full theological treatment of church conflict may be pardonable.

Nevertheless, Boers seems to bring his Bible to his family systems mindset rather than developing a family systems theory out of his study of the Bible. More recent writers (David Brubaker, in *Promise and Peril*, for example) note that family systems theory works for smaller

churches, but general systems theory is needed for churches that have more than one “cell” or primary social unit.

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR COMMENTS:

Boers notes that, “The **church’s voluntary nature also exacerbates difficult behavior** and the intensity of church conflicts. The fact that people volunteer may make others unable to recognize inappropriate behavior or to hold people to account. Members refuse to recognize destructive behavior in those who attend regularly, give sacrificially, or volunteer extensively. Members recognize only reluctantly the shadow side of such folk and fear losing their attendance, gifts, or volunteer efforts” [pg 22, bold added].

He also points out that, “It is appropriate for churches to have unhealthy people. ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick’ (Mark 2:17). But churches do not just include and embrace unhealthy people, nor do they strive unreservedly to heal the ill or bring maturity to the immature. **Churches are often special havens and arenas where the immature or highly anxious act out.** While anxiety is normal, high anxiety is destructive and harmful” [pg 51, bold added].

Question: We combine volunteer culture and unhealthy people in church organizations. Does this make churches especially vulnerable to conflict?